PITTA

No. 65 Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh September 1996.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 29th: Mahavir Harin Vanasthali, Vanasthalipuram. Members are requested to reach the destination on their own and meet at the entrance of the Deer Park at 7:00 a.m. This will be a half day trip.

EDITORIAL

— A. P. —

A casual remark by someone about 'listing', "oh! they just *list* birds" set me thinking about this activity. What does listing achieve ? Listing, by the way, is the making of a list of birds seen in an area. It may not be far from the truth to state that 99 percent of the world's birdwatchers are listers. Lumpers of course are different! And then there are the splitters too! But this is about listers and their lists.

- A list is the basic record (data) of birds seen in an area, which a birdwatcher keeps.
- The very presence or absence of birds within an area is reflected through such work.
- It reveals if any unusual species or rare birds exist, or were seen at different times of the year, in the area.
- If the activity is repeated periodically, it reveals the pattern of bird movements within an area.
- Lists tell us which species is migratory and which is not. It is another cog in the mysterious maze of avian distribution.
- If more is to be obtained from a list, it can be jotted with abbreviations like H (heard), S (Song), N (Nesting), etc., and thus lists reveal much more than the above.
- Who's breeding, who's raising young, who's singing, and who's waging battles for territory are some of the observations which can be noted in a list.
- The diet of birds too can be recorded in lists.
- A list reflects the status of the habitat through the diversity of birds observed, and could alert us if that habitat is threatened.
- A census is a list of birds with their visible/audible population noted beside their names.
- Regular censuses (recorded as lists) display vagaries of distribution, health of habitat, trends in bird populations.
- Thus a list could become the most powerful tool a birder has, perhaps the only one that *anybody* has, in the assessment of an area's status, with factual data. Whether it (the area) is endangered and what decisions are necessary to safeguard it.
- Everybody should begin to fill their field notebooks with lists of their sightings !

NOTES & NEWS

Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh conducted a three day camp at Mananur, within the Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve area, from 27th to 29th July 1996. Nine members of the Society attended the camp, including a young enthusiast, Preeti Singh (age 9 years).

We were provided a forest guest house at Mananur. This guest house is within the sanctuary area and is a convenient starting point for treks into the nearby forest. We visited a spot on the nearby hillock of Mananur, from where we had an elevated view of the forest. On the way to this spot we noticed many local birds and animal tracks near a water hole and also had a very good look at the area from a watch tower. Another spot we visited was the Umamaheswaram temple, which was reached after a trek of 24 kms. across a terrain with much ups and downs in

it. The journey was rich with the calls of peafowl, grey jungle fowl, iora and green barbet. All of us enjoyed this trek and the birding along it and participants were enthusiastic for the third day's trek. On the last day, a jeep was hired and we drove to the Farahabad plateau. There we trekked in the forest, led by a Chenchu tribal, who is employed by the Forest Dept. Tracks of bears, chital, sambhar, wild boar and wild cats were noted. A few water birds like spotbill ducks, lesser whistling teal and grey herons were also seen here. After visiting Bandla Kurla view-point, we returned to Mananur and packed up for Hyderabad. A total of 60 species of birds and spoor of 7 wild animals were recorded. The Mananur forest area needs to be observed on a regular basis for it is rich in bird and animal diversity. (M.S. Kulkarni). [Editor's Note: The old forest guest house at Mananur (built in 1905) has been blown up by the People's War Group on 9-9-1996].

Here is some news from the Chernobyl area, where a nuclear disaster struck a decade ago and a large area was covered by fatally high levels of radiation. It appears that when humans are removed from an ecosystem, the ecosystem can survive, even thrive. Despite radiation levels as high as 450 rads (humans develop acute radiation sickness at levels of 300 rads or more), the plants and animals of the area around Chernobyl have survived - although sometimes in dramatically altered form. In fact, some scientists go so far as to speculate that the benefits for wildlife of a human-free environment may outweigh even the effects of radiation. Authorities in Belarus and Ukraine are now considering declaring the exclusion zone a wildlife sanctuary, where scientists will be able to chart the effects of radiation on plants and animals. According to Ukrainian biochemist Ihor Shokhalevich, it has already become something of a refuge. In the decade since the accident, eagles, cranes and black storks have reappeared. Studies on the barn swallows of the area, show that radiation has caused the tails of males to become more asymmetrical, which makes the male a less attractive and healthy mate; consequently, the Chernobyl swallows are finding it more difficult to mate and reproduce. Teals, mallards and coots show high concentrations of radionuclides - an ominous statistic, since these are the main prey for human hunters in the area. (adapted from AUDUBON vol. 98(3): 71. May-June 1996).

Acre for acre, living forests are often more valuable than the sum of their timber, especially because they grow back quickly.....The clouds of carbon dioxide we've released since we evolved into *Homo automobilis, Homo thermostatens,* and *Homo walmartius* are now poised to raise the temperature four or five degrees Fahrenheit in the next century. Forget the way this heat will feel - forget the sweat gluing you shirt to your back - and consider only that magic bottom line. Economists have calculated, extremely conservatively, that global warming could knock 2 percent off the world's gross product over the next century by depleting resources and increasing energy use. Since forests and their soils contain immense amounts of carbon that would otherwise contribute to the greenhouse effect - perhaps one and a half times as much as in the atmosphere, according to George Woodwell, director of the Woods Hole Research Center, on Cape Cod - keeping the forests standing has a quantifiable economic impact. Recently, a university team assessing the worth of Mexico's forests for everything from tourism to nuts found that their highest value was a reservoir of carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere, accelerating climate change. This rule holds true in many forests. "If you have a Sitka spruce stand in the Tongass [National Forest, in Alaska], it might contain more than fifteen thousand grams of carbon per square meter," says Woodwell. "And if it's clear-cut, it contains very little," especially because much of the carbon in the now unprotected soil. If new trees grow, they will slowly soak up carbon. But it will be a long time before they contain even half as much as the native forest. (Mckibben, B (1996): What good is a forest? AUDUBON 98(3): 54-63.).

Ever since swiftlet nests became an important item in Chinese cuisine and pharmacy, Edible-nest Swiftlets have been exploited throughout their range. Today, at US $ 2629 - $ 4060 a kg. the edible nests of swiftlets rank amongst the world's most expensive animal products. India has two species of swiftlets that make edible nests. The Indian Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor* is found in the Western Ghats, the Malabar coast and in Sri Lanka. The Edible-nest Swiftlet *C. fuciphaga* occurs in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The nests of *C. unicolor* have an admixture of grass, moss or feathers, and is of a lesser value. *C. fuciphaga* makes nests wholly of saliva, which is of a

very high commercial value. The Edible-nest Swiftlet are currently not covered by International Trade Laws, and in India receives no protection by Law as it is not even in Schedule IV of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act.

The population of *C. fuciphaga* was estimated to be between 2500 and 3600 breeding birds. Nest collection had taken place in 24 of 36 caves in the Nicobar islands; in 23 it was very intense. In 16 of these, the proportion of plucked nests to the total nests was 90% or more, and in 12 it was 100%. In only one cave was it very low (6%). Intensity of nest collection was the greatest in the Great Nicobar group where only 14% of the nests were intact. In the Nancowry group, 24% of the nests were intact (excluding the one cave where nest collection pressures were unusually low). The decline in population was evidenced through a decline in yields, which ranged between 40% and 95% over the last decade or two, with only one cave not having undergone a significant loss in yield.

The Edible-nest Swiftlet in the Nicobar islands is Critically Threatened (IUCN criteria Alc), as it has undergone a reduction in numbers greater than 80% over the last 10 years. The immediate measure to be taken is to include this species in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protect-ion) Act (1972). The only practical way of conserving this species is by effectively stopping the movement of swiftlet nests between and out of the islands, by checking people and cargo embarking or disembarking on all ships and flights to the mainland. Inclusion in at least Appendix II of CITES, will result in importing countries not accepting consignments from India, which would help the conservation of the endangered Indian populations of the Edible-nest Swiftlet. (R. Sankaran (1995): Impact Assessment of Nest Collection on the Edible-nest Swiftlet in the Nicobar Islands. SACON Occ. Rep. 1, pps. i-iii, 1-26. SACON, Coimbatore.).

The field trip held on 11th August '96 covered the CIEFL Campus and the Landscape Gardens situated on the Osmania University campus. On this pleasant and cloudy day - the children and the parents of the CIEFL campus cheerfully received the members of the BSAP at the CIEFL main gate. This was a half day outing that started around 7.30 in the morning. The CIEFL campus is a small little green place and the birds do like to visit our campus - indeed some of them have made the campus their permanent home. On this day a lot of common birds were seen, viz., black drongos, common mynas, coucals, white-headed babblers (seven sisters), koels (both male and female), palm swifts, house swifts. Of course we could not miss the joyous notes of the redvented bulbuls. A solitary cormorant did wish us a cheery "Good Morning" in flight and flew on to perform its daily chores. We had the privilege to see a flock of seven to eight cattle egrets in their breeding plumage, i.e., orangish yellow feathers on their head, back and the breast. Apart from these birds we also sighted pariah kites, a solitary Indian roller, tree pie, sunbirds, flowerpeckers and kingfishers. There were not so common sightings also like that of the grey hornbill and the elegant paradise flycatcher. In fact the sighting of the flycatcher on our campus is so rare that when Ranjan, one of the youngest members of our campus told us that he saw one, we couldn't believe him. But his description was so apt - as big as a bulbul, white body with black head and two long tails like white ribbons hanging from the back - that we had no doubt that it was indeed the paradise flycatcher. We all heard the tailor bird calling but just could not spot it! Members of the BSAP drew our attention to the long drawn whistling notes of the plaintive cuckoo. We also sighted a squirrel's nest on one of the neem trees.

Around 10 o'clock we gathered at the CIEFL Guesthouse, had snacks and moved on to the Landscape Gardens on the Osmania University campus. As it was quite late in the morning we did not have many sightings. However, some members were lucky to spot the paradise flycatcher - a temporary migrant from the CIEFL campus (?) or possibly it wanted to join us in the birdwatching! Young birders from our campus were terribly excited when they spotted a whitebreasted kingfisher roosting on the acacia tree next to a pond. Thanks to excellent light conditions we could thoroughly enjoy the bright fluorescence of the kingfisher's plumage. Another beautiful sight to note was the spotted munia carrying strands of grass to its nest. The little munia had intelligently converted the bulb-less lampshade of an overhead street light into its beautiful little nest. For once we were thrilled that the Works section never bothered to fit in a bulb in the lamp shade! We were also shown nests of the house swifts in the arches of the roof of Ravindra Auditorium of the Osmania University. On our way back home we also saw a lot of house swifts' nests in the high arches above the main entrance to Arts College. We stood in front of the main gate, our heads al-

most touching our backs and marveled at the speed at which the swifts darted into their nests sometimes stuck in very awkward places! On the whole for the first timers it was a very pleasant and rewarding experience and I think that most of them enjoyed the outing very much and have serious plans to join the BSAP. Good for us ! (Swati Totawar, member BSAP.)

Roger Tory Peterson, the Birdman of America is no more. He was born in 1908 and passed away at the ripe old age of 87. A gifted painter, he combined a passion for two childhood interests, painting and birds (he lacked any formal ornithological training), to produce a series of bird identification guides in which he devised a method of identifying birds which made the sport of birdwatching a popular one in his country, and his name a household one. Looking for a bird in a Peterson guide was akin to searching for a word in the Webster's dictionary. His unique method of using small arrows to point out the prominent features of a bird's plumage along with brief, no-nonsense bird descriptions that were as minimal and sharp as his illustrations, made birding easy for generations of amateurs. A first print of 2000 copies of his Guide sold out within a week and a second had to be ordered almost immediately. Seven million have been sold ever since. Peterson produced alone, or with collaborators, scores of other guides on such subjects as wildflowers, butterflies, mammals and minerals. His books have been translated into a dozen languages. (Adapted from *Time* 12-8-1996)

A remarkably preserved fossil from Spain shows birds were able to fly 115 million years ago, shortly after they arose through evolution and thus have access to wide range of food and habitats. They appear to have been so good at flying then, 50 million years before the dinosaurs became extinct, that they would maneuver on the wing about as well as their descendants do today. The now extinct Spanish bird could have flitted between branches or alighted on a lofty perch as effortlessly as a sparrow, said Mr. Luis Chiappe, one of the seven paleontologists who described the fossil in Thursday's issue of the journal *Nature*. Found squashed between two slabs of rock in a limestone quarry, the finch-sized fossil suggests that evolution had perfected flight not long after birds arose. The preservation of this specimen is so spectacular it has not only all the feathers in place, or most of them, but also the contents of its last meal. The bird holds the remains of tiny shrimp like crustaceans in its belly...(contributed by our member, M. S. Kulkarni & gleaned from *The Hindu* dt. 2-8-1996.)

A tiny bird, smaller than a bulbul, has bird-lovers in Delhi all aflutter. A rare sight, the Bristled Grassbird has been spotted near the banks of the Yamuna, a little above the barrage at Okhla. Birdwatchers Bikram Grewal, Sudhir Vyas and Otto Psister found this rare bird and noted its distinctive call. It makes short, sharp sounds. "It's a noisy bird that cannot be overlooked," says Grewal. "There have been very few sightings this century: one from Bangladesh, four from Pakistan and one from India." *Chaetornis striatus* in Latin, the brown bird seems to stick to its marshy, reed-filled habitat. Records reveal that the bird was last sighted in Delhi way back in 1962. In spite of subsequent searches, the Bristled Grassbird proved elusive until now. (*India Today* September 15, 1996, p. 134.)

For Private Circulation Only

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PITTA

No. 66 Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh October 1996.

PROGRAMME

Ind 13/2/2001

FIELD OUTING: 13th: Narsapur Reserve Forest. Members are requested to reach the destination on their own and meet at the culvert adjacent to the temple on the main road at 7:00 a.m. This will be a half day trip, but members desirous of spending a full day in the area, may do so.

EDITORIAL

—AP.—

The two publications of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh, *Mayura* and *Pitta*, were started with the aim of providing a forum for members of the Society and other birdwatchers to communicate their notes and observations to each other. While the former is a bi-annual newsletter in which longer papers and miscellaneous notes are published, the latter is a monthly which informs members of BSAP's programs and also serves as a bulletin for interesting news of the avian world from around the globe.

When launched, it was felt that *Mayura* should be an exclusive newsletter for information on the ornithology of Andhra Pradesh. Except for an occasional paper, contravening this 'condition', It has always been so, too. The justification for such a case being that a 'regional' publication would be more sharply focused and therefore disseminate more information about an area, even though that area was not bio-geographically, but politically demarcated. Indeed, at that time, the move was appreciated by senior ornithologists like Lavkumar Khacher who felt that it was the right thing to do. Regular notes and papers from members and non-members has kept the publication 'going' but of recent there is a slackening in the inflow of these notes, resulting in an almost empty file with the editor ! Of course, contributions from researchers working for the Bombay Natural History Society have also receded dramatically, as their projects have been completed and nothing new taken up in the state.

The idea has been put forward by a few members that *Mayura* should commence accepting bird notes and papers on observations from areas outside the state of Andhra Pradesh. This would perhaps bring in more manuscripts for the publication and also increase the readership (and membership !) of the BSAP's publications. We would like members' and readers' reactions about this point.

NOTES & NEWS

The late Dr. Salim Ali was immortalized in stone at the Bharatpur Sanctuary, when a statue of the renowned ornithologist was unveiled there by the Rajasthan environment and forest minister, Raghuveer Singh Kaushal on 20-9-1996. It has been installed at the gate of the Keoladeo Ghana National Park, with which Dr. Ali had been associated for more than 50 years. (*The Asian Age* 23-9-1996).

With remarkable timing, given the recent *Sea Empress* disaster off Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire, a new paper by Brian Sharp (*Ibis* 138: 222-228) queries the value of the intensive bird de-oiling efforts that follow such tanker accidents. Sharp suggests that most birds cleaned up after being heavily oiled are dead within 10 days of release. This finding is based on an analysis of recoveries of ringed birds, using data extracted from US Fish and Wildlife Service files for 1969-94, including data following the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska. Unoiled birds survived 20 to 100 times as long as those ringed after being cleaned of oil.

The clean-up rate has improved - only 2% of birds rescued after the Torrey Canyon spill in 1967 were released back into the wild, whilst the RSPCA anticipates 60-80% of birds recently brought to them in South Wales to be successfully cleaned up and released (*New Scientist* 2020: 5). However, Sharp suggests that simply releasing a cleaned bird cannot be regarded as a 'success'. Despite massive improvements in the cleaning technology in recent years, this appears not to be reflected in improved survival rates. Sharp's study includes a recent case of 78 Guillemots found oiled, which were cleaned then released, of which most had died within two weeks, and only two were found alive more than a year later. Critically, Sharp concludes that a

'negligible' number of recuperated birds survive long enough to breed.

Clearly the clean-up organizations must give serious consideration as to how they are using their resources in the aftermath of oil spills. Whilst the RSPCA accepts that many birds do die shortly after being released, they take some satisfaction from the small number of birds that survive - and cite a case of a Guillemot known to still be alive in the wild 11 years after cleaning. (King, J. (1996): OrnithoNews. *Birding World* 9(5): 201).

One of nature's most spectacular sights - the annual migration of millions of birds throughout the world - is seriously threatened by global warming, says a new report from World Wide Fund for Nature, Washington. The report, which names the world's 15 most critically affected sites, details a widespread disruption in migratory patterns as prime feeding and breeding grounds are lost to sea level rise, changes in the timing of seasons, and drier weather.

"The effect of global warming on bird migrations is like a family setting out on a cross-country road trip only to discover that all of the gas stations, hotels and restaurants are closed," said Mr. Adam Markham, director of WWF's Global Climate Change Campaign. "You would-n't get too far and you might not even survive."

Birds rely on relatively stable weather patterns and the availability of food sites and food resources to complete their migratory strategies. Long-distance migrants may travel hundreds or even thousands of miles without stopping and must often double their weight in food before leaving to build up fat deposits.

Global warming will wreck havoc with the migratory cycle, affecting many species' chances of survival during every part of their journey; at the breeding grounds, the wintering grounds, and the stops in-between.

"Coastal sites such as the Chesapeake Bay or the Mediterranean are so important for the bird species that use them every year as stop-overs for 'refueling' and any threat could put millions of birds at risk.," Mr. Markham said. "If any of these so-called 'critical' sites are lost, the whole balance of the migratory process can be thrown off," he added. (*The Hindu* 21-9-1996 p. 16). [Editor's note: Pulicat Bird Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh and Point Calimere Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu, are coastal areas in India which would also be drastically affected due to global warming.]

The Bristled Grassbird *Chaetornis striatus* (*Pitta* 65: 4) was first reported from Andhra Pradesh by Dr. Salim Ali. He observed these birds and obtained 3 specimens on 24 & 25-2-1937 "during a visit to Mulug (Warangal district), in company with Col. R. Meinertzhagen." (Ali, S. (1938): An additional list of birds from Hyderabad State. *JBNHS* 40(3): 497-499). On the basis of this information, two members of the BSAP, M.S. Kulkarni and Aasheesh Pittie visited Mulug on 28 & 29-4-1996, in the hope of locating this bird.

All the peripheral area surrounding Ram-appa Lake (where the birds were seen by Salim Ali) is used for agriculture (paddy). Being summer, most of the crop had been harvested (?) as the water-line receded. Just one small field existed and was being watered with the help of a pump. There were no reeds in sight at all around the Lake. Grazing was heavy and perhaps disastrous for such specialist species as the bristled grassbird, of which we did not see even a single bird. There is hope that it has adapted to the changed environment and still exists in the surrounding areas. Only regular and systematic study will reveal whether this is true. (M.S. Kulkarni & Aasheesh Pittie).

Sunday 29-9-96 saw the members of the BSAP gathered at the Vanasthali Deer Park around 7 a.m. Unforseen circumstances prevented us from entering the park before 8.30 a.m. We were glared at right by the entrance to the park by a pair of Spotted Owlets *Athene brama*, basking in the early sunlight readying themselves for a day's siesta after a hard night's work ! Unfortunately our joyous exclamations forced them to move to more restful surroundings. This close encounter with the 'wise kind' set the tone for the children in the group in particular and the rest in general.

We were surprised at the lack of undergrowth this time within the park, despite the more than average precipitation this Monsoon. The chital and blackbuck, however, looked healthy. We were pained to see a marked increase of the Devil Weed *Parthenium* sp. all over the park. This may be affecting the undergrowth which in turn would lead to the birds moving elsewhere. The cheerful chirping of the Purplerumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* stopped our pessimistic musings!

One of the members was alert enough to discover a live cocoon on one of the *Acacia* sp. trees and showed it to all of us. The fever-

ish notes of the Common Hawk-Cuckoo *Cuculus varius* made us look upwards where we saw a flock of Pariah Kites *Milvus migrans* soaring in the hot currents, their keen eyes scrutinizing the ground below for food. Our scanning the skies brought into focus an Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*. Vultures normally do not have heavily feathered heads for hygienic reasons as they have to delve into carcasses for food. The head of the Egyptian vulture is feathered as it feeds on the scraps flung aside by other carrion eaters.

The sun was beginning to warm us up rather uncomfortably and we decided to head back to the gates of the park. On the way we startled a Grey Partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus* whcih took off with a flurry of wings. We also heard the harsh screaming 'may-awe' of the Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* and found a lot of the males' tail feathers. Large Grey Babblers *Turdoides malcolmi* bid us farewell in their traditionally loud, monotonous 'kay kay kay kay' ! In all 20 species of birds were seen. A list is available at the Society's office. (Dr. Vinay Totawar & J.V.D. Moorty.)

THIS-FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 1

The Australian Blackbreasted Buzzard,a bird of prey, is very fond of huge eggs laid by emus and bustards in shallow dips in the ground. The buzzard frightens off the victim by gracefully nose-diving at the totally exposed nesting bird. Then as the nesting birds depart, the buzzard, rather than break the shell with its strong beak, takes a stone or a lump of hard earth in its claws and bombs the egg with it. After this there is nothing more left for the buzzard to do but enjoy the high-protein-meal! (From: Jean Dorst. *The Colourful World of Birds.* Hamlyn. London. 1963. pp. 90-95. Contributed by Dr. Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty).

FIELD CRAFT

Analogous to the study of all outdoor natural history, proficiency in birdwatching too pivots around field craft. Many hours spent outdoors, *looking* at birds, *absorbing* their 'field-characteristics', their *jizz*, their calls and their idiosyncratic behaviour is what shapes an amateur into a confident birdwatcher whose identification is reliable.

This occasional column, will make available to readers, pointers in field craft, which we hope, will help them identify and observe birds with greater ease and dexterity, resulting in maximum satisfaction from their field trips. The contents of this section will consist of extracts from published literature (as the one below) or notes of practical field-methods and tips from our readers. We will also try and answer questions from members about identification and field craft. Where possible and available, illustrations will be used. As the readership is varied, it is only natural that the contents include material for beginners as well as advanced birders. Benefit may be derived from this column by either making notes in personal copies of field-guides or pasting the contents/tables, etc., in field guides so that information is available on-hand when birding!

Readers are encouraged to write us their identification problems and also send contributions and suggestions for this column. **Source**: Clark, William S. (1996): Ageing Steppe Eagles. BIRDING WORLD 9(7): 268-274.

AGE CHARACTERS OF STEPPE EAGLES *Aquila nipalensis*

Character	Juvenile	Second-winter	Third-winter	Fourth-winter	Adult
Underwing band	pale & wide, but occasionally absent	pale & wide, but occasionally absent	pale & wide, but occasionally absent	short streaks	absent
Band on trailing edge to wing	pale, wide & regular	pale, wide & irregular	pale, narrow & irregular	dark & wide or narrow	dark & wide
Uppertail-coverts	white	white	white	white, with dark markings	dark
Underparts	medium brown, uniform	medium brown, slightly mottled	medium brown, mottled	darker brown, mottled	dark brown, uniform
Carpal patches	same as other coverts	same as other coverts	a few dark feathers	darker	blackish

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST - 1

In response to a request from one of your editors, who complained that "Material is truly scarce", these notes will be mailed regularly for inclusion in *Pitta*. As he suggested, my column will "consist of not just comments on the content of the bulletin, but thoughts, notes, suggestions, projects, observations, etc., etc." on the birds we all love and hopefully wish to make observational studies on, in the time we manage to find. A suggestion right away wonders why the B.S.A.P. wants to restrict its 'terms of reference' only to the Avifauna of Andhra Pradesh ? Granted that this could be its members' main objective, but perhaps their bird watching reports made in other Indian States should also find a place in its publications and discussions in meetings ?

November 1996 will be Salim Ali's birth centenary month and I dedicate this opening letter to his memory, with fond remembrances of our interaction in earlier years. He was one of our last remaining 'Classical Naturalists' of the Old School, a 'personality' which emerged in Europe after their Renaissance in the 16th century and which sadly disappeared here after we became independent almost 50 years ago, as a result of most such distinguished naturalists leaving our shores for their countries of origin. The Natural History scene has deteriorated rapidly since then and has never bounced back, effecting the dismal situation we now experience with regard to real *passion* about nature study within ourselves here. Note that contemporary 'environmentalists' are not necessarily *good* naturalists and that Conservation is *not* equal to Natural History.

The burgeoning interest about Natural History in Europeans and later on among their colonial populations in other parts of the world (including India) was a consequence of the positive social and cultural climate in Europe after the Renaissance. Material well-being and growing trade, coupled with a sense of security, led to the many expeditions to unknown tropical 'paradises', over land and sea, by now famous explorers. Our subcontinent has been very fortunate, courtesy of the spice and cotton trade and the silk route, in 'tempting' a whole stream of excited, learned naturalists arriving in our countries and making collections and observations of the exotic fauna and flora that abounded here. In effect therefore, compared to many other countries of the tropics, India and its neighbouring nations have had their animals and plants studied in reasonable detail, at least the larger 'beasts' and the several dicotyledons.

Contrary to current opinion and prevailing information among interested Indian students of Nature, there are a large number of books and articles published on our wildlife during the past three centuries, but their availability is limited to a few large libraries here. Even research materials of our botanical and zoological specimens are in large part deposited in museums all over Europe. Access to literature and research collections, or even to a consenting foreign specialist agreeing to help one of us with our work, isn't easy and is the root cause for the generally sub-standard, low quality output by Indian and other south Asian naturalists and bird watchers or biologists. So far we have been handicapped by survival and bread-and-butter (rice-and-daal !) concerns in our day to day lives and this may be the prime reason why the kind of love for Nature and its study, existing in developed western countries, is yet to blossom with plenty of vigor and emotion here. However, in the past two decades or so, we have developed rapidly in economical, job-related and higher educational spheres and the present times are very favourably suited to a serious, appropriately guided, spurt in the volume and level of Natural History studies by already motivated persons.

Ten years ago, a year or so before Salim Ali left us, he made some comments in his letters to my questions regarding the need for a new journal on Ornithology and on the lack of feedback and guidance to younger bird watchers from the few experienced seniors like himself. Taking the cue from Salim Ali's wisdom, we should attempt to recreate the comprehensive, lucidly drafted prose, packed with data and keen observation, and fashion the kind of regional bird survey reports that filled the many pages of *J.B.N.H.S.* and of Allan Octavian Hume's *Stray Feathers* (S.F.) during the last century. The bird watchers of today must find the time and the will to put together their notes and observations on the avifauna of their District and submit manuscripts for publication. Such updated District (or Area) bird surveys would be invaluable when they are compared to an older work of that region, if published and available, and provide interesting and important data on species and population changes during the intervening years. Readers may obtain other suggestions, regarding the kind of work one would like to expect from now active field ornithologists or amateur birdwatchers, in my article titled 'Serious Birdwatching' in the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* (*N.F.B.*, 1976, 16(8): 1-6) which is now published from Bangalore (write to me for copies).

Our bird watching community in this sub-continent is now more than ready for a 'take-off', and I for one will be pleased to help anyone with literature research or answers to questions either by myself or with the assistance of ornithologist friends world-wide. Perhaps some of you will take the trouble to pick up a pen and write to me, or to your editors, if you wish to prod, question or inform us about something you have read, seen or heard about birds. So let's begin and mail your letters to me at P.O. Box 8439, Bangalore 560 084. Enjoy your birding - not just by watching them, but also by reading, writing, thinking and discussing about them and their lives, by yourself and with friends sharing your invigorating interest. - Dr. Kumar Ghorpade.

For Private Circulation Only *For more information write to:*
Hon.Sec: Rajiv Mathew, 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad 500482. Ph: 310721. **Editors:** Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher.

PITTA

No. 67 & 68 Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh November & December 1996.

PROGRAMME

Ind. 17/2/2001

FIELD OUTING: 15th December: Rourial Tank (also known as Ravirala), on the road beyond Falaknuma palace, towards Pahadi Shareef. Members are requested to reach the destination on their own by 7:00 a.m. This will be a half day trip.

28th & 29th December: Anantgiri. This outing is tentatively planned for 2 days. if permissions are obtained in time. Members are requested to call up the editor (Ph: 3320269) or the Hon. Secretary for confimation.

NOTES & NEWS

Members of the BSAP visited Narsapur Reserve Forest on 13-10-1996. This is an all-time favourite spot for birdwatching, given its mix of habitats like forest stream, village tank, agricultural fields, small hills and foothill plains, all within a very small area. The stream we always walk along, had a good flow of water in it, thanks to the recent rains. 47 species of birds were seen. Members had good sightings of whitebrowed fantail flycatcher, paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, rufous-bellied babbler *Dumetia hyperythra*, crested honey buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, black redstart *Phoenicurus ochru-ros*, grey hornbill *Tockus birostris*, red munia *Amandava amandava*, common woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus* and white-eye *Zosterops orientalis*.

"The 16th Maharashtra State Friends of Birds Meet will be held at Solapur (Maharashtra) on Saturday 11th & Sunday 12th January 1997. In this confer-ence. lectures. seminars, discussion and exhibitions on bird life and the central theme of the conference 'Peoples Sanctuary' have been arranged. Along with the formal deliberations, film and slide shows, recital of poems on birds and visits to the neigh-bouring bird sanctuaries at Hipparga and Nannaj have been also arranged. The dates of the meet coincide with 'Shri Siddheshwar Yatra' a famous annual event. The participants can also participate in the fun and frolic of the fair. Lodging and boarding arrangements for all the delegates will be done by the organizers in the neighbourhood of the venue." For further details, readers may please contact Prof. Dr. Ninad V. Shah, Organizer, 16th Maharashtra State Friends of Birds Meet, 94 Sidheshware Peth, Umbarje Building, Solapur 413001. Tel. No. 0217-20615.

THIS FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 2

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

We all are familiar with a bird of prey flying away with its meaty catch. But ever heard of a bird carrying another bird? Lovely aerial-taxi service isn't it?! Believe it or not. the Woodcock picks up its young ones between its thighs and flies away to a safer and quieter place when disturbed. Ornithologists have indeed seen the woodcocks carry their chicks on their backs. Since it is very difficult, rather almost impossible for the female woodcock to place the chicks on her back all by herself, it is generally believed that the young climb over the mother while she is sitting in the nest like ducklings or cygnets. Disturbed by a passerby or the curious birder, the woodcock, most probably, flies off as is and the young clutch on to her by the feathers and they may well be amazed to find themselves airborne ! [From Jean Dorst. *The Colourful World of Birds*. Hamlyn. London. 1963. Contributed by Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty].

Our member. P.V. Patanjali, is the convenor of the University of Hyderabad Adventure Club (UHAC), which organized a slide show on 20th November. the birth centenary of Dr. Salim Ali, on Indian wild-life by Dr. Venkatramanarsaiah, . in the University campus. The show was well attended (c. 70 people!) and the audience admired slides from various wildlife sanctuaries like Kanha, Simlipal. Bandipur Ranthambhor. Kaziranga. Sariska, etc. In the question-answer session, Dr. Narsaiah stressed the need for management of the forests by the local people and. if possible, by private organizations committed to con-

servation. In his introductory address, Patanjali spoke about Dr. Salim Ali and his pioneer-ing role in popularizing birdwatching in India.

Three adult Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* have arrived in the Keoladeo Ghana National Park at Bharatpur, much to the delight of conservationists as it was after some years that the endangered birds showed up in November. They were seen resting after their arduous migration from Siberia, across thousands of kilometers, flying over six countries Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India ! (Based upon a report in *The Hindu* 19-11-1996).

Mr. Arul. K has "taken-up a project to study the distribution and ecology of Bazas (*Aviceda* spp.) in India." He has sent a format for data to the editor and requests that details of sightings and any information that readers have on the two species of Bazas that occur in India, be sent to him. All contributions will be duly acknowledged. You may write to the editor for copies of the form, or to him directly at Sellappampalayam Post, Udumalpet Taluk, Coimbatore Dist. 642207, Tamil Nadu.

A tiny acrobat inhabits the forest canopy of Brazil's vast cocoa plantations, and its discovery has left bird lovers elated - and alarmed. It is *Acrobatornis fonsecai*, a bird previously unknown to science. But the rapid destruction of what is thought to be the bird's only habitat has ornithologists worried that its discovery may soon be followed by its extinction. Mr. Jose Fernando Pacheco, a researcher at the Federal University of Rio De Janeiro and one of the discoverers, said the small and grey bird was dubbed the "acrobat" because it spent most of its time upside down, running back and forth along the underside of branches. The second part of the bird's name, *fonsecai*, comes from Paulo Sergio Fonseca, a bank worker and devoted birdwatcher who first spotted the bird. (*The Hindu* 16-11-1996).

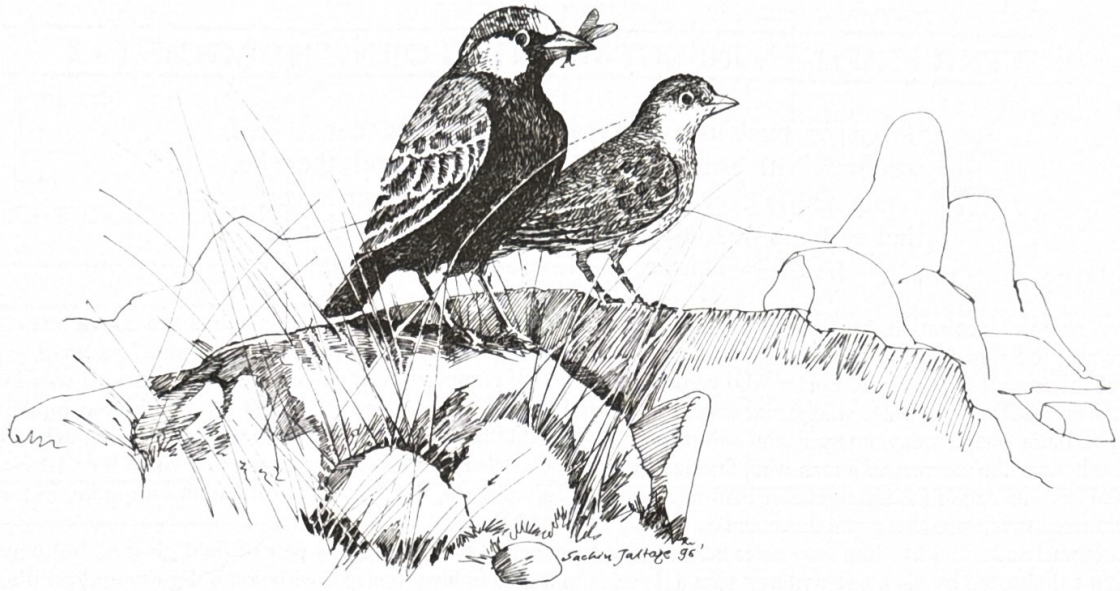
The Asian Waterfowl Count-1997 will be held from 4-26 January 1997 (both inclusive). Readers who would like to participate and have not received separate intimation, may please contact the Regional Coordinator (A.P.), Siraj A. Taher, 2/B Atlas Apartments, Road No. 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, for information and census forms. You are requested to census the waterbodies you covered last year so that regularity and integrity of data is maintained. Additional sites may certainly be censused ! Completed forms must be returned before 15-3-1997 to the above address. Of paramount importance is the accuracy of bird identification and placement of doubtful / unidentified species under their proper group e.g. "unidentified waders". Good Luck !

The chimera of biological control of a species by the introduction of an exotic biological predator, seems to fascinate the forest department of Andaman & Nicobar Islands once again (see *Pitta* No. 41, May 1991). Samir Acharya of Society for Andaman & Nicobar Ecology (SANE) writes of renewed efforts on the part of departmental personnel to lobby for the introduction of the Barn Owl *Tyto alba stertens*, a mainland race, onto the Islands "to control the arboreal rats whose population increased dramatically due to the introduction of another exotic, the red oil palm, brought in by the Forest Corporation". This despite the fact that *T. a. deroepstorffi*, an endemic race of this bird, already exists on the Islands ! The repercussions of such nonsensical actions being well known, readers should write letters of protest to the Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests, Andaman & Nicobar Administration, Van Sadan, Port Blair 744 101, and mark copies to SANE, P.O. Box 63, Port Blair 744101, A & N Islands.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 1997? DO SO NOW !

Please send your cash / cheques / demand drafts favoring 'Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh to Mr. Rajiv Mathew, the Honorary Secretary at the address given at the end of this bulletin.



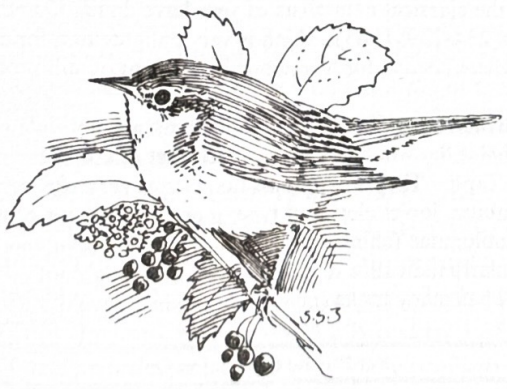
ASHYCROWNED FINCH-LARK *Eremopterix grisea* (Male & Female)

FIELD CRAFT

Top 10 Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* identification checklist:

1. Short primary projection.
2. Sloping forecrown and tapered bill.
3. *Sylvia*-like call [the distinctive contact call is a soft, coarse "teck" (similar to but not as clipped or metallic as, Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*)]
4. Prominent fore-supercilium.
5. Emarginations on third and fourth primaries.
6. Greyish-toned legs.
7. Lack of contrast in wing-feathers.
8. Lack of contrastingly ginger rump.
9. 'Banana' posture.
10. Tail flicking.

Any bird showing the full suite of characters will surely be one! The characteristic 'jizz' would be a cumulative effect of the long, sloping forehead and tapered bill (giving a 'snouty' look), undeniably short wings (usually held slightly drooped, with the rump exposed) and somewhat pot-bellied stance; the so-called 'banana' posture is often evident, as a result of the habitually up-tilted head and tail. Though the tail is held relatively proud, it is never truly cocked and never appears large; indeed, the bird actually looks quite short-tailed. [Adapted from: Golley, M & Millington, R (1996): Identification of Blyth's Reed Warbler in the field. BIRDING WORLD 9(9): 351-353.]



BLYTH'S REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST - 2

"From too much love of living, from hope and fear set free,
we thank with brief thanksgiving, whatever gods there be,
that no life lives forever; that dead men rise up never;
that even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea."
(A.C. Swinburne, *The Garden of Proserpine*)

My boyhood inspiration, M. Krishnan, who breathed his last in February this year, included the above lines in his brief remembrance note to Salim Ali [*Hornbill* 1988 (3+4): 29, 1989]. He also wrote that "Salim Ali was not merely a great naturalist: he was a man of refinement and culture, a man who cordially detested all pomposity and pretentiousness but who was incapable of anything petty or needlessly carping, who found enough zest and joy in life to compensate for all its pitfalls and injustices, a true gentleman in an India where, today, integrity and culture are so rare and little valued." This month, the 'ornithological world' will be doing its bit to honour the memory of a man who, through 'providence', felled a yellow-throated sparrow when 9 or 10 years old and then rose up to become one of the unforgettable instrumentalists of an orchestra, that plays a harmonious symphony in tune with the beauteous feathered musicians that grace this green earth.

Another Hindostani like him may ne'er be seen again, peering at birds through a pair of field glasses, but why don't we, who have been enlightened by his many writings, take a decision to follow in his footsteps, with some dignity and ornithological accomplishment, that would have made Salim Ali genuinely proud of us ? Let's not just 'take' pleasure from birds by 'watching' them occasionally - let us train ourselves to *make notes* on our observations and document *facts* about their lives which could be used to make them a little better in coming years.

One objective of these Letters would be to suggest 'projects' or ideas we need to think about carrying out and also to aid your attempts at going about with them successfully. Last month I wrote about each of us thinking of putting together a detailed report on the Avifauna of the District we live and birdwatch most in. Such a regional survey I believe is a must for any serious ornithologist or amateur bird watcher, to be written up and published (part by part if need be), then kept updated from time to time. If more than one of you can team up together and pool your notes on the birds and their lives in your District, what could be better ? From my side I will try to provide a comprehensive literature survey of what has been written on the birds of these areas and strive to assist in solving troublesome identification problems anyone has. My "Preliminary notes on the Ornithology of Sandur, Karnataka" (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1974, 70: 499-531 - photocopies available on request) can serve as a model of a District bird survey, and the *J.B.N.H.S.* carries many such papers that will repay consultation.

There are 346 Districts (mostly as of the 1961 re-organization of Indian States; see OLD SYNOPSIS, with map on plastic sheet enclosed in the back cover) apportioned to 11 biogeographical sub-regions or areas I recognize within the Indian Union: Western Ghats (24 Districts), Eastern Ghats - Carnatic (25), Deccan Plateau (28), Central Highlands (99), Rann - Desert Plain (43), Gangetic Plain (66), Western Himalayas (30), Eastern Himalayas (9), Assam Valley - Hills (19), Andaman - Nicobars (2) and Laccadives (1). Andhra Pradesh is composed of 20 Districts belonging to these four socio-cultural geographical zones: Telengana [Adilabad, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Medak, Hyderabad (and Rangareddi), Nalgonda, Khammam, Mahbubnagar], Rayalseema [Kurnool, Anantapur, Cuddapah, Chittoor], Andhra Carnatic [West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Nellore (including Prakasam)] and the Northern Circars [Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam (with Vizianagaram), East Godavari (including Yanam)]. The last mentioned zone (with the so-called Vizag Ghats), north of the Godavari River, is biogeographically *distinct* from other parts of the Indian Peninsula south of the Tapti and Godavari rivers. The Northern Circars are sal *Shorea robusta* dominated, with a distinct influx of east Himalayan and Assamese elements, like the Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*.

Only the Telengana zone belongs to the Deccan Plateau and what were previously the Hyderabad Nizam's Dominions fall into this area covered with the 'black cotton', volcanic, Deccan Trap soil. The Marathwada zone [Aurangabad (with Jalna), Bhir (=Beed), Parbhani, Nander, Osmanabad (including Latur)] and the Hyderabad Karnatak [Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur] also belonged to the Hyderabad Princely State, and the following Districts now in Maharashtra and Karnataka fall within the Deccan Plateau as well - Dhulia and Jalgaon (Khandesh), Ahmadnagar, Poona, Sholapur, Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur; Belgaum, Bijapur and Dharwar. Perhaps it is these 39 Districts that members of the BSAP could concentrate on to investigate the bird species that occur there. Data on the climatology, geology, soils, flora and fauna of these Districts are available with me or could be procured from the literature or at offices of the Conservator of Forests.

In these days just watching birds and not bothering about their ecosystems and interaction with other bird and animal species, the vegetation, soil type, weather parameters, etc., will not result in useful information needed to really understand the lives of our feathered reptilian co-habitors, like the classical naturalists of yore have done. Do read Hugh Whistler's 'advice' to Salim Ali (in *The Fall of a Sparrow*, Appendix 1, pp. 234-239; 1985), which is very enlightening for any of us today, though we may not need to collect specimens for research, except where needed for taxonomic refinement of still problematic bird groups (taxa), or studies of food eaten.

The Deccan Plateau and the Rayalseema - Andhra Carnatic areas are non-inclusive of the heavy rainfall, high elevation tropical rain forest flora and fauna that inhabit the windward slopes and crest of the Western Ghats, which run parallel to the Malabar-Konkan coastline, north to the River Tapti. They instead are home to a *very different biodiversity*, still little-known and researched, which is a predominantly dry habitat, lower elevation type, more reminiscent of an east African wooded steppe and semi-desert ecosystem, where all four Indian Antilopinae (chinkara, blackbuck, chowsingha and nilgai) roam or roamed and the Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* is a singularly indicative representative. So though not even one-third as rich as the Western Ghats 'Hot Spot', the rest of peninsular India still has many tricks (mysteries) 'up its sleeve' !

- Dr. Kumar Ghorpade

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For more information write to:
Hon.Sec: Rajiv Mathew, 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad 500482. Ph: 310721. **Editors:** Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher. **Illustrations:** Sachin Jaltare (p. 3) & *Birds of Nepal* (Carol & Tim Inskipp, p. 60) by Richard Grimmett (p. 2).

IP TTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh **No. 69 : January 1997.**

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 19th : ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru. Members are requested to reach the destination on their own by 7:30 a.m. and assemble at the main gate. Transportation within the campus will be arranged. Lunch will be provided on to-pay basis. This will be a full-day trip.

EDITORIAL

-AP-

SHAMIRPET LAKE

The winter of 1982: A small lake, formed in a depression of the land, bunded on one side and the water used for agriculture. Boulders of every size and shape surround the waters and also form islands within the lake. A few agricultural fields are on one side, amidst the rocks, and near the water's edge, some villagers are making bricks from the wet mud. A lone fisherman punts his make-shift raft near the shore. Peace, quietude and ascending lark-song. At every step, Pipits, larks, Wagtails and Little Ringed Plovers dart away or rise if pressed, settling again a few yards away on the close-cropped green turf. The squeaky-clean air and the angle of light on the entire landscape enlivens it into a graphic three-dimensional kaleidoscope of such intimate detail and vitality that one could not wish for more perfect surroundings. Small flocks of Greynecked Buntings, perhaps at the southern-most outpost of their migrant wanderings, browse amidst small boulders strewn all over like marbles by a giant hand. A pair of Indian Coursers is espied sauntering in the fields, some distance away. On a boulder, shaped like a platform in the middle of the lake, is a flock of nearly 80 Small Indian Pratincoles, sunning their milky bellies. The list of birds crosses 70 (*G. lactea*) species each of waterfowl and waders species before noon. A dozen Godwit, Curlew-Sandpiper and (including Curlew, Blacktailed raptors (Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Dunlin), at least 12-14 species of larks (the endemic Syke's Crested Redheaded Merlin !), a plethora of least 4 species !), and a variety of Lark is a sure-shot here!), pipits (at avian attractions of this wonderful other perching birds are among the place.

The winter of 1996: Heavy rains have filled the lake with water. A large ugly building looms on the opposite (from the Deer Park) shore, housing a specialty hospital. A tourist complex promoted by the A.P. Tourism Department stands almost forlorn, adjacent to the Park. Omnipresent is the nerve-racking sound of breaking granite. A monstrous 'unfriendly neighborhood stone-crusher' hammers the dirge of progress into a numbed mind. The entire landscape is dotted with workers busy hammering chisels into boulders (even small 2'x2' ones are fair game !), an occasional blast of dynamite (spelling the doom of yet another rock) perhaps a shot in their arm. The dry top-soil rises in eddies at the slightest breeze and the ground is littered with granite chips. Fishing-net floats dot the lake as half a dozen fishermen are busy at various points over the water. One wonders at the plight of the poor tourist ! And the birdlife ? Gone are the buntings, gone the coursers and the pratincoles (their island rock sliced and broken into scarred ugliness one summer when the water dried up). Ears strain for the song of the "Ethereal minstrel" and faintly hear the "unpremeditated art" above the clatter all around. The flotilla of waterfowl is thin, shorebirds slip away in hurried flight. Nature clings on to a carpet which is disappearing rapidly from under her feet. A pair of Ashy-crowned Finch-larks is busy raising a brood of 3 chicks in the shelter of a small stone, in a perfectly camouflaged nest, a few yards away from a man busy breaking stones

The Future: The very existence of this once beautiful natural habitat is at stake. The threat is from blind and ignorant development. If the surroundings are cleared of all boulders, can the flora survive for long ? And this deterioration ('development') is so widespread that it almost certainly encircles the entire catchment area of the lake within its tentacles. Perhaps unwittingly, development of the area will smother the lake. In the process, top soil is eroded and agriculture suffers; the water-table dries up, snowballing into a local water supply crisis; the fishermen suffer as water level recedes; during heavy monsoons water-logging and attendant problems become rampant; cattle (and thus shepherds) suffer for lack of browse. Will a tourist like to visit such a place ?

Only if all the above activities are stopped within the catchment area of the lake upto its shores, will Shamirpet survive. Its imperative that developers should take into cognizance the role of natural features in an area demarcated for development. Birds (through a record of their presence and absence over time) are thus indicators of the quality of the habitat and an alarm system that alerts us. Lark-song is one of the cornerstones of 'sustainable development' and ensures the satisfaction of tourists and sufficient supplies of drinking water.

NOTES & NEWS

The existence of the natural habitat of the Mountain Quail in Mussoorie and Nainital has led ornithologists to believe that the bird last sighed 120 years ago may not be extinct after all. This extremely shy bird is (may be) still alive somewhere in the lower Himalayas where suitable conditions for its existence prevail, a study conducted by the WWF-India claims. Citing the reasons for the extinction of a species, the study, appearing in the latest newsletter of WWF-India, says loss of habitat, poaching and exploitation were not applicable to the Mountain Quail. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that the bird has been sighted ever since a female was shot dead on the ridge "Sher-ka-Dhanda," overlooking the Nainital Lake in 1876, the study, undertaken by Brig. (retd.) R. Anjit Talwar notes. The earliest authentic record of the existence of the Mountain Quail, a bird slightly smaller than the Grey Partridge, was made in 1836 when a British sportsman, Tucker, collected a pair from nearby areas of Mussoorie. During these 40 years between 1836 and 1876, only eleven specimens of the bird were collected from Mussoorie and Nainital, nine of which are preserved in various museums of the world. The bird was known to appear occasionally and in the neighborhood of Mussoorie and Nainital during winters, according to late A.O. Hume, famous British ornithologist. Writing about the Mountain Quail in his 1879-91 publications, *The Game Birds of India, Burma and Ceylon*, Mr. Hume said it was a bird of singularly retiring habits, could scarcely be induced to show itself unless pressed by a dog, and appeared only in the season when the hill stations were largely deserted. [*The Hindu* 17-12-96 (Clipping sent by M.S. Kulkarni)].

THIS FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 3

Motmot *Momotus momota*

The South American Motmots have long tails consisting of two long central tail feathers. Often each tail feather ends in a small "racket" at the end of a long "stem". For a long time the ornithologists were puzzled by the absence of barbules along such a great length of each feather and thought that these barbules were probably very fragile and, therefore, fell off of their own accord. But later it was observed that the birds plucked them off themselves by contorting themselves into weird positions - nothing short of aerial acrobatics of the highest order! - and tearing them out with their beaks. No one has so far found the scientific reason for this strange behaviour. It appears to us, that the reason, definitely, must be cosmetic and the whole thing must be part of the nuptial ritual?! Nevertheless, it must be noted that the new tail feathers that grow after the moult are full webbed. No "rackets or fans"! [From Jean Dorst. *The Colourful World of Birds*. Hamlyn. London. 1963. Contributed by Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty].

"Birds and Toddy Palms: It is the practice in these districts as in many others, to tap the palm trees for toddy. A horizontal cleft is made in the trunk just below the branches; from this a short, narrow vertical slit is made into which is inserted a small piece of split bamboo, which acts as a gutter to carry off the liquid away from the trunk. An earthenware bowl or chatti is suspended so that the gutter leads into its mouth. It is a frequent, though not invariable, practice to tie or wedge a small bunch of grass over the gutter, no doubt to keep insects away from the liquid. A cloud of flies can usually be seen hovering over the outlet, whether the grass is there or not. The flies, no doubt, attracted some species of birds, but so did the liquid itself. The bamboo gutter formed a

most convenient perch and the birds made full use of it, taking the liquid as it flowed down the chute. I have seen several species do this, and on one occasion I saw a Tickell's Flowerpecker fluttering a few inches below a gutter to which no bowl was attached, and catching the drops of liquid as they fell. In all, I have seen the following species at the liquid: Jungle Crow, Jungle Babbler, Red-vented Bulbul, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Black Drongo, Tailor Bird, Common Myna, Jungle Myna, Pied Myna, Grey-headed Myna, Tickell's Flowerpecker, Golden-backed Woodpecker, Mahrata Woodpecker (The last two species were not seen to drink the liquid, and were probably after the insects attracted by the exposure of the sweet liquid)". [Lister, M.D. (1951): Some bird associations of Bengal. *JBNHS* 49(4): 695-728.]

The much awaited book, on the art front, *Salim Ali's India* was released in Mumbai recently, by eminent environmentalist and industrialist, Soli Godrej. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Godrej described this attempt a tribute to the renowned ornithologist, Dr. Salim Ali. The book is a collection of 52 fine reproductions of antique colour plates from rare books compiled by Dr. Ashok Kothari and Dr. B.F. Chhapgar of the Bombay Natural History Society. It also carries lithographs from earlier works of renowned painters and also a description of old Mumbai. Some of Ali's works are as rare as the birds, the book describes. The function also saw the auction of the painting by Mr. J.P. Irani called *Bhorghat*, which was bought by Mr. Godrej himself. [Newspaper clipping contributed by M.S. Kulkarni].

The European Court of Justice ruled recently that economic requirements need not be considered while allocating and defining the boundaries of an environmental special protection area. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), UK, had challenged the UK environment secretary's decision to designate the Medway estuary and marshes in Kent as a special protection area excluding a mud-flat saying that its economic value exceeded its conservation value. The RSPB argued that the secretary was not entitled to take account of economic considerations when classifying a special protection area. [*Down to Earth* 5(12): 11.]

On his way back home, after the Pan-Asian Ornithological Conference at Coimbatore in November, Jonathan C Eames (Coordinator, BirdLife International Vietnam Programme), and a colleague visited Rollapadu Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary where they saw 6 Great Indian Bustards *Ardeotis nigriceps* "and had good views of 2 males displaying just outside the reserve. In addition, we had very good views of a female Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* and saw groups of up to four Wolves *Canis lupus* daily. The harrier (*Circus* sp.) roost was magnificent with up to 500 birds roosting daily. They included mainly Montague's Harriers *Circus pygargus* but also included Pallid *C. macrourus* and a few Marsh Harriers *C. aeruginosus*." They also saw Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Little Pratincole *Glareola lactea*, Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiatcus* and Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*. They also visited Horsley Hills where they saw the Yellow-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus*. Their luck held in the Sri Lankamalleshwar Wildlife Sanctuary where they were able to locate a single specimen of the enigmatic nocturnal Jerdon's Courser *Cursorius bitorquatus* and also a pack of 9 Dhole *Cuon alpinus* !

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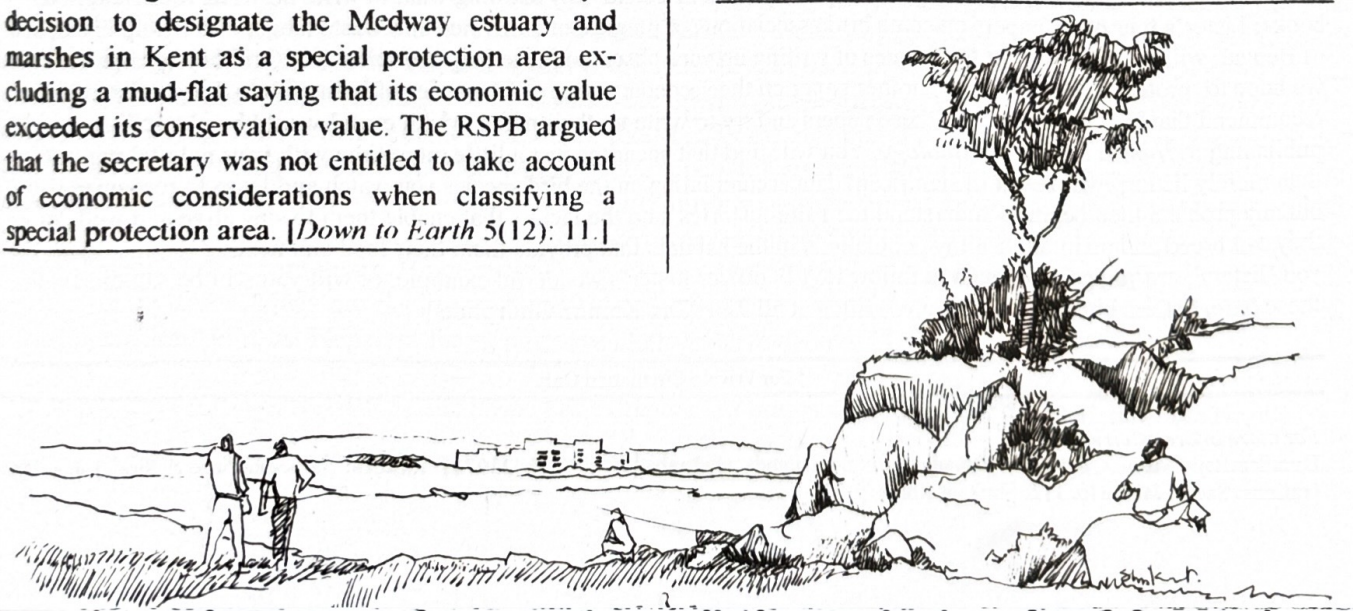
We wish all our readers a very Happy & Bird-filled 1997 !



LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST - 3

> "To know one's limitations and to do good work within them: more is achieved that way than by overreaching oneself. It is no use trying to write a masterpiece every year if you are so made as to write only one in ten years! In between, there are other good things that can be written - smaller things, but satisfying in their own way." (Ruskin Bond, From my Notebook in ***The Best of Ruskin Bond & Delhi is Not Far***, 1994)

A glance at the 'Eclectic Bibliography' in the INDIAN HANDBOOK (Ali & Ripley, 1974, 10: 245-272), with an index to regional references, reveals the almost complete dominance of European ornithologists' contributions to the knowledge of the birds of our sub-continent. Apart from Salim Ali, Humayun Abdulali, Jamal Ara, Biswamoy Biswas, Dharmakumarsinhji, Himmatsinhji, Lavkumar, Law, Mukherjee, Neelakantan, Roonwal, Saha, Sanjeeva Raj and Sivrajkumar, no other native Indians (let alone anyone from our neighbouring countries !) had any substantial work to their credit. Ali & Ripley, with the technical assistance of Bond, Desfayes and Serrao (see INDIAN HANDBOOK, 10: vii-viii), cited a total of 744 major references selected from thousands of other books, papers and notes published from 1864 to 1971 (*not* 1972 as stated on p. 245) on the Indian sub-continent's birds. Ripley's NEW SYNOPSIS (1982, pp. 576-579) listed a further 19 important publications up until 1976, and I have prepared a list of some 30-40 other references overlooked by these two compilers, mostly from periodicals of the Zoological Survey of India and local Universities, besides biological or applied science journals. Checking the *J.B.N.H.S.* issues published from 1972-1996 (Vols 68-93) has turned up another 50-60 significant contributions on our Ornithology, but many of these have also been written by non-Indian ornithologists! A rapid scan of the author names through the 160 pages of the PITTIE INDEX (1995) will support my drift.

Not only are there very few of us Indian who venture, or even dare, to research and then fashion *comprehensive* regional surveys that the 'British Indians' (as I like to call them) were able to accomplish so effortlessly well, but we also seem to have fallen nowadays into this exasperating habit of producing birds' lists (see Editorial in *Pitta* 65) which, according to me, offer very little information to passionately serious ornithologists like myself. Other than the problem of accepting identifications of the more difficult groups of birds in these lists made by unrecognized amateurs, such compilations of just names (and little else!), based on sight records, furnish practically nothing of any value to Ornithology. Such efforts are the 'games' that contemporary bird watchers play to satisfy themselves. In my Critique of the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* [*N.F.B.*, 1973, 13(8): 1-5 - photocopies available on request], I wrote about my "observation.....that the majority of present-day birdwatchers seem to be more correctly termed 'tick-hunters' [see *Newsletter*, 11(12): 1 and *Animals*, 11(7): 326] in concordance with their obsession for ticking off the number of bird species seen by them in their lifetime." No kudos from me for your apparent 'achievement', Ms Snetsinger (see *Pitta* 64: 3), if you haven't *contributed* anything to Ornithology, besides just tick-hunting for your own selfish goal of creating a 'record' (for the Guinness Book?). As someone who has been in the editing business for the last two decades or so, I believe part of the blame should also go to the editors of these mostly quasi-scientific periodicals, who encourage and accept such lists. Hopefully, the high standards of the past will be demonstrated by the more capable among us bird watchers today, so we can set a better example which will really help the birds we all supposedly 'love'.

One of the most admirable 'listers' I know of was M.D. Lister (!), an officer of the Royal Air Force, stationed during the II World War years of 1942-1945 in what was then the Presidency of Bengal. He also spent time in six other locations presently in Punjab, Delhi, Bihar, West Bengal and Burma, besides his 17-month posting at Jessore, now in Bangla Desh. Holidays, drawn out of ordinary or sick leave for about a fortnight each, were spent on tea gardens in Darjeeling District (once also for most of April-June 1945) and his bird watching there resulted in a 50-page paper (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1954, 52: 20-68) where he presented his data on the status, recognition, behaviour and voice of 167 species of mainly forest (and tea plantation) birds, in what is a very mountainous area devoid of water-bird habitats. His 4-year bird watching data was documented in seven papers published in the *J.B.N.H.S.* Volumes 49-52 (1951-1954, see INDIAN HANDBOOK 10: 259, nos 409-414). His article on "Birds and Ecology" should make most of you understand how to increase the value of your bird watching time, spent in town or country, by learning what to write down in your field notebooks. Lister's four other papers on some bird associations of jungles, of cultivated and waste lands, of built-up areas, and of Bengal, will help you master techniques of writing up your observations to help the science of Ornithology and the birds we hope to 'protect'. He also wrote another paper on the secondary song of 14 species of Indian birds. I wholeheartedly recommend that bird watchers *read* these papers and try to write up their notes, which even I would be pleased to consider publishing in *Humea : Field Ornithology*. You will find that spending just a little more time with your note-taking (rather than merely listing) will result in significant data accumulating on the bird species you watch and learn to recognize without any problem then begin to understand their life-histories, and the factors that enable them to stay alive and well, so they can breed and maintain healthy populations in the habitats that provide them their food and nesting requirements. So, you 'listers', are you game enough to follow R.A.F. officer Lister's wonderful example, or will you still be satisfied with these bare, listless bird lists, if they are written at all ? **- Dr. Kumar Ghorpade**

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For more information write to:
Hon.Sec: Rajiv Mathew, 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad 500482. Ph: 310721. **Editors:** Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher. **Illustrations:** Sachin Jaltare (p. 1) & Shrikant Kolhe (p. 3).

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 70 : February 1997.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 16-2-1997: Palmakole Tank, Palmakole village, Mahbubnagar Dist., 30 km. from Hyderabad on the Bangalore NH 7. Members are requested to reach the destination on their own by 7:30 a.m. and assemble at the bus-stand. This will be a half-day trip.

EDITORIAL

How does a birdwatcher *extend* the activity of watching birds, from that of just jotting a list of species seen, into something more meaningful? One way is to record *accurately* and *diligently*, the condition of the habitat being covered by his/her birdwatching. The question arises here, of what to record for such a purpose? What signs to look for, what questions to ask and whom, how to follow-up on this work? Regular notes over time, of both, the habitat (a simple, coded 'assessment' of the birdwatcher's own design could be used in the field), and its avifauna, will reveal the state of that environment at any point of time and also illuminate the action to be taken to correct / forestall deterioration. Perhaps the quote below will give a good idea of what happens when natural habitats are 'threatened' by human activity. Though the following notes are for forests in Nepal, our predicament in India, is generally similar.

"Forests are depleted in the following ways. Tree branches are cut for fuel and foliage; oaks *Quercus* spp. are often heavily lopped to provide animal fodder and bedding, frequently reducing forests to low coppice 2-3m in height. Lopping often leads to the stunting and finally the death of trees and an impoverishment of the variety of species as only some trees can survive this treatment (Rieger 1981). Large quantities of bamboo *Arundinaria* spp. and *Bambusa* spp. are cut for weaving mats and baskets and for construction work. Excessive number of livestock are held in Nepal and forests are used for grazing throughout the year. Livestock feed on young plants, leaves and twigs of small trees, often severely reducing the understorey and even preventing forest regeneration altogether. In many forests the undergrowth and ground layer are burned regularly, often annually, to improve the growth of grasses. This practice favours the spread of fire-resistant species, such as pines. Pines are often succeeded by broad-leaved trees, but frequent fires prevent this. The result is an open forest of old pines lacking undergrowth and only supporting a low variety of bird species. The understorey in many forest types is suffering from uncontrolled cutting, over-grazing or burning. Its loss or reduction must drastically affect the bird species composition. Many species, including babblers, warblers, chats and thrushes inhabit this part of the forest ecosystem. Unfortunately it has not been possible to assess the condition of the forest understorey from air photographs. Some tree species, such as oaks, are favoured for construction work and so are felled in preference to others. Selective felling over a long period can change the forest composition and also its wildlife. During a study of a seemingly healthy forest in the Arun valley, Cronin was surprised at the lack of certain bird species. He found that local villagers had felled oak in preference to other species. As a result *Castanopsis* trees had become dominant and a drier forest had been produced with a lower variety of plants and birds than previously (Cronin 1979). Besides the opening up of forests by selective felling, removal of foliage and lopping of branches must also result in their becoming unsuitable for the numerous species which require dense or moist forests. Species which prefer open forests, such as some flycatchers, may well have benefited as a result of forest thinning. Presumably birds which frequent scrub, such as the White-cheeked Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*, Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferrea* and Striated Prinia *Prinia criniger* must have also increased in recent years. However, most species in this category are common and wide-spread in Nepal, whilst many forest birds are declining. Overall forest depletion can have benefited relatively few species and the populations of most Nepalese forest birds are likely to have decreased."

[Inskipp, Carol (1989): *Nepal's Forest Birds: Their Status and Conservation.* pps. 202. ICBP Monograph No. 4.]

NOTES & NEWS

ROURIAL - AN INTERESTING FIELD-TRIP

J.V.D. Moorty & Vinay Totawar

Driving past Charminar towards Falaknuma Palace, through Barkas, onto the Srisailam road, can be an exhilarating experience at the rather quiet hour of 7 a.m. on a Sunday. We were headed for Rourial lake, the venue for one of the regular birding field-trips for the BSAP on 15-11-1996. It was a misty grey morning.

Rourial is c. 20 km. from Charminar and is a fairly large waterbody. Off the Srisailam highway there is a metalled road leading to a Govt. of India installation. And beyond this road is a dirt track going to the lake. The track to the lake passes through dull shrub-land dotted with a lot of *Acacia* and plenty of *Palmyra* and date palms. The soil is generally grainy, sandy and reddish in colour. The general topography of the area reminded one of gentle ups and downs, however, most of the stretch was flat with a mound here and there. The occasional mounds hosted some lovely rocks that are synonymous with the landscape around Hyderabad.

We stopped at a weir which in its heyday must have done a fine job of stopping the water. Today the water's edge is a good 700 m. away from this weir. Between the weir and the lake there were plenty of fields, and among the crops we found tomatoes, spinach, chilies, *red gram*, sunflower, *gongura* and coriander. There were paddy and wheat fields. Going by the aggressive cultivation and reclamation of the dry parts of the lake, we fear, soon we may be talking about a puddle! The lake, as it now stands, is an ideal roosting and nesting place for aquatic birds.

Our noisy group disturbed a pair of Spotted Owlets *Athene brama* perched on th branches of an *Acacia* and as we approached they quietly took wing to a more distant and peaceful tree of the same species. In fact the entire area abounded with these trees and also tall, stately palms.

Our progress was halted b a row of *Acacias* which harbored a Baybacked Shrike *Lanius vittatus* and a warbler we could not identify. A pair of Redwattled Lapwings *Vanellus indicus*, searching for insects, 'interrogated' our arrival. Near the water's edge were a pair of Blackwinged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, busily pecking away. They made a lovely picture with their sleek red legs contrasting with the black wings, and their reflection in the shallow water!

A shrill piping announced the arrival of the Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*. We set up 'camp' at the edge of the water and were promptly rewarded with a Coot *Fulica atra* carrying a 24" long dry reed transversely in its beak along the water, to its nest which was a floating mass of such reeds c. 100 m. from the water's edge, on open waters. This was surprising as its principal nesting season is reported as July-August and the nest is generally found in matted reeds (Salim Ali's *The Book of Indian Birds*). Some way to the nest, the bird began to run on the surface of the water, furiously fluttering its wings. It laid the reed across the nest and preened itself. It was joined by a fairly large chick which copied its parent to a nicety.

Further away from the shore were a large number of Pintails *Anas acuta*, easily distinguished by their very prominent 'pintails', with a group of Common Pochards *Aythya ferina* and a few Redcrested Pochards *Netta rufina*. A flock of ducks circling the far shore had large shovel-shaped beaks, Shovellers *Anas clypeata*! A Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* winged its way languidly across the waters before coming to rest on one of the numerous islands that dotted the lake.

A Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* dashed overhead, hovered on fluttering wings and abruptly nose-dived into the water, coming up with - nothing! The diving whistle of the Ashycrowned Finch-Lark *Eremopterix grisea*, drew our attention. And there, above the lark, silhouetted against the, by now, blue sky was a Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*. It was looking for the funnel of hot air to soar upwards and very soon it was spiraling. This was quickly noticed by a Kestrel *Falco*

THIS FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 4

African Gold-coast Touraco *Turacus persa*

The African Gold-coast Touraco *Turacus persa* have magnificent colourful plumage. They have red purple spots on their wings contrasting with rest of their green plumage. The colouring is brilliant but if the wings get wet or washed in water the colour comes off. The red spots dissolve and the water becomes coloured. It is believed that after a heavy rain these birds' wings get completely discoloured. This red pigment which is not protected by the thick, horny layers that generally cover feathers, is related to the hemoglobin of human blood, which explains its strong colouring power. [From Jean Dorst. *The Colourful World of Birds*. Hamlyn. London. 1963. Contributed by Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty].

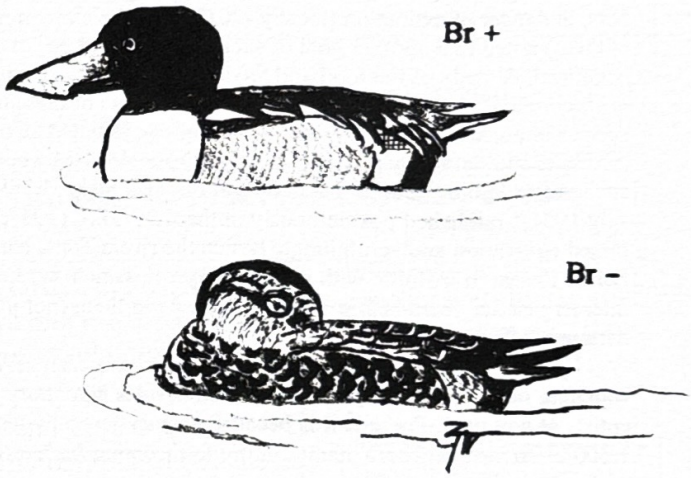
tinnunculus and both these raptors were very soon specks high above.

One of us saw a lone River Tern *Sterna aurantia* beating its way leisurely across the water. But there was more in store - the cry of 'raptor' had us all concentrating on a fairly large bird which materialized into an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*! A few years ago we had seen it fish at ICRISAT Asia Center, and here was another!

After a quick breakfast, we went over to the eastern side of the lake. There was a 'community washing up' activity going on with lots of *dhobis* beating away the dirt from clothes. A cricket match in progress was temporarily halted as we wended our way towards the water's edge. A flash of pink marked where three Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala* stood on an island alongwith a couple of White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephal*. A pair of Spotbill Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha* had us on the hop, as they were so contorted and at such a distance that we had to exercise great patience and wait for them to turn around for correct ids. As we turned back, a Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* streaked past on its golden wings and a Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* bid us adieu !

Birds Seen at Rourial on 15-12-1996

LITTLE GREBE	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
LITTLE CORMORANT	*Phalacrocorax niger*
GREY HERON	*Ardea cinerea*
POND HERON	*Ardeola grayii*
CATTLE EGRET	*Bubulcus ibis*
LITTLE EGRET	*Egretta garzetta*
PAINTED STORK	*Mycteria leucocephala*
WHITE IBIS	*Threskiornis melanocephala*
PINTAIL	*A. acuta*
SPOTBILL DUCK	*Anas poecilorhyncha*
SHOVELLER	*A. clypeata*
REDCRESTED POCHARD	*Netta rufina*
COMMON POCHARD	*Aythya ferina*
LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE	*Aquila pomarina*
PALE HARRIER	*Circus macrourus*
OSPREY	*Pandion haliaetus*
KESTREL	*Falco tinnunculus*
GREY PARTRIDGE	*Francolinus pondicerianus*
COOT	*Fulica atra*
REDWATTLED LAPWING	*Vanellus indicus*
GREEN SANDPIPER	*T. glareola*
COMMON SANDPIPER	*Tringa hypoleucos*
BLACKWINGED STILT	*Himantopus himantopus*
RIVER TERN	*Sterna aurantia*
BLUE ROCK PIGEON	*Columba livia*
LITTLE BROWN DOVE	*Streptopelia senegalensis*
ROSERINGED PARAKEET	*Psittacula krameri*
SPOTTED OWLET	*Athene brama*
HOUSE SWIFT	*Apus affinis*
PALM SWIFT	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*
PIED KINGFISHER	*Ceryle rudis*
WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
SMALL GREEN BEE-EATER	*Merops orientalis*
INDIAN ROLLER	*Coracias benghalensis*
HOOPOE	*Upupa epops*
ASHYCROWNED FINCH-LARK	*Eremopterix grisea*
COMMON SWALLOW	*Hirundo rustica*
BAYBACKED SHRIKE	*Lanius vittatus*
RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE	*L. schach*
GOLDEN ORIOLE	*Oriolus oriolus*
BLACK DRONGO	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
BRAHMINY MYNA	*Sturnus pagodarum*
COMMON MYNA	*Acridotheres tristis*
HOUSE CROW	*Corvus splendens*
JUNGLE CROW	*C. levaillanti*
REDVENTED BULBUL	*Pycnonotus cafer*
LARGE GREY BABBLER	*Turdoides malcolmi*
ASHY PRINIA	*Prinia socialis*
TAILOR BIRD	*Orthotomus sutorius*
INDIAN ROBIN	*Saxicoloides fulicata*
PADDYFIELD PIPIT	*Anthus rufulus*
LARGE PIED WAGTAIL	*Motacilla madaraspatensis*
PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD	*N. zeylonica*
PURPLE SUNBIRD	*Nectarinia asiatica*



Shoveller *Anas clypeata* (Male)

Two men convicted of smuggling more than $1,000,000 worth of cockatoo eggs into the United States from Australia received prison sentences in December of 1995. William Wegne was sentenced to 60 months in prison and Brian Bradley was sentenced to 41 months. Many members of the ornithological community pressed for strong sentences in the case. [Blom, E A T (1996): Quick takes: High cost of eggs. *BWD* 19(1): 10.]

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LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST - 4

"The older I get, I don't crave for genius, but just simple competence in every field, from Adultery to Zoology." (Notes from a *Letter from America* by Alistair Cooke on the B.B.C., February 1995)

Royal Air Force officer M.D. Lister's "Contribution to the Ornithology of the Darjeeling Area" (cited in my last letter) was limited, owing to his being able to spend only a few weeks in that region. So, I would like to highlight here the work of another 'M.D.' (Doctor of *bird* Medicine !), a Mrs. M.D. Wright, in the Central Indian Province of Berär (consisting of the current Maharashtra Districts of Buldana, Akola, Amraoti and Yeotmal, just north of Telengana and part of the Vidharba socio-cultural subregion), published in the *J.B.N.H.S.* (1942, 43: 428-445), where she gave a lot of notes on 193 species of birds seen in that area. Her Introduction makes very interesting reading, worth quoting in part here for the reader's benefit. Mrs. Wright's husband "toured extensively and very frequently over all the districts of Berar" and she spent 14 consecutive months here, doing much of her bird watching "through the car windows" ! She relied on Hugh Whistler's *Popular Handbook of Indian Birds* (1928, now in its 5th edition) for identifications and called it "that invaluable guide for students of Indian ornithology whether serious or not." Stuart Baker's NEW FAUNA (1922-1930, 8 vols.) was also used and "There was no murder done, field glasses sufficing for what the eyes cannot see . . . There are no new discoveries; but as Hugh Whistler mentions in the foreword of his book [his 8-page Introduction is excellent and very educative reading - K.G.] only by reports of those interested in the bird life of their localities can the bird life of India really be known." She concludes by telling the reader that "In trying to follow out his suggestion I have spent a most delightful year in Berär."

Seven years later Mrs. Wright published "A bird count in Dehra Dun" (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1949, 48: 570-572, with a map of counting area and a table listing the 142 species counted) made between March 1948 and February 1949, in an open cultivated area "1 mile long by 600 yds. wide at its widest part." One of her chief aims was "to show up which species are on the decrease in numbers, in danger of extinction [locally - K.G.] and therefore in need of special protection." A footnote by the editors (Salim Ali was one of them) noted that another goal of such counts would be "to determine the significance of individual species economically harmful or beneficial. A study of the food and feeding habits by itself is inadequate unless the local population density of the investigated species is ascertained." In addition to the water-bird counts of these times (why only in winter, when we also have several resident breeding species in our wetlands too ?) that are being co-ordinated all over our sub-continent, bird counts in agricultural and forest ecosystems (artificial and natural habitats, respectively) are also badly needed now. Perhaps members of the B.S.A.P. would consider organizing such varied habitat counts? Mrs. Wright did also make detailed "Notes on the birds of a selected area of Dehra Dun - June 1946 to July 1951", published posthumously in the *J.B.N.H.S.* (1957, 54: 627-662, with a map), where she treated 226 species occurring in mixed cultivation and scrub jungle beside the rivers Tons, Nun, Nimi and Gaulaita, north of the National Defense Academy and the Forest Research Institute with its 'New Forest', which were also surveyed. In about a dozen years, this lady, whom birds began to interest just six years before she began *studying* them (not just watching !) in India, from October 1939, I believe did use her time here very effectively.

Apart from Mrs. Wright, there really have been very few ladies, our 'birds of no feathers', who have taken seriously to bird watching here. This is surprising, but then besides laboratory technicians, there haven't been many of the female sex among top scientists at any time. Perhaps it is because women generally tend to 'think' with their hearts rather than with their brains? Out of the 1,500 or so bird watchers' names in my forthcoming *Indian Birdwatchers' Directory & Guide*, only 136 are of women, a mere 9 % of the total.

Again, unlike Mrs. Wright, not too many of our lady bird watchers have put their observations in writing. I have a list of less than 20 of these who I know have done so at least more than once, at some length. One, a Mrs. Desirée Proud, wife of the then First Secretary of the British Embassy at Kathmandu, stands tallest among them. From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, she 'fashioned' more than a dozen important papers and notes on the birds of Nepal. Her first (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1950, 48: 695-719, a map and a plate) was based on just a year's work, from February 1948 to February 1949, documenting notes on 214 species seen in "the Nepal Valley itself, and the hills immediately surrounding it." She was able to identify and observe between one-fourth and one-third of the total of around 775 species that were so scholarly treated by the Zoological Survey of India's bird taxonomist, Biswamoy Biswas (th work of this accomplished Indian ornithologist, who died recently, has not been given the importance it deserves), in his 11-part systematic survey of Nepal's Avifauna published in the *J.B.N.H.S.* (1960-1964, Vols 57-60), and she went on to treat many more species during the next decade or so. More recently, the wives of Martin Woodcock (the author and illustrator of COLLINS HANDGUIDE, 1980) and of Tim Inskipp who co-authored *A Guide to the Birds of Nepal* (1985), have been active in the field and continuing the good work. Without doubt, the towering Indian lady ornithologist has been Jamal Ara, who also passed away last year, besides the late Usha Ganguli whose book, *A Guide to the Birds of the Delhi Area* (1975), published by the I.C.A.R. [see my review in *N.F.B.*, 17(1): 8-9; 1977], is very well written. Only Mary Peacock, whom I met at Hyderabad (Deccan) in 1990, and who managed to 'list' some 224 species of birds seen in the I.C.R.I.S.A.T. Campus (see *Mayura*, 1994, 9:1-10, map. Also, Hash & Peacock, 1996, *Mayura* 11: 16-27, map) also deserves special mention.

This then has been the pattern - we, who *live* in this country and sub-continent, seem to take our bird life for granted. So much so that the pages and pages of data, that the serious bird watchers and 'professional' ornithologists of today consult and benefit from, do not get written by any more than a mere smattering of us. Even today, visitors from overseas spend just a few weeks or months here and are able to contribute *in writing*, to our Ornithology. I hope that through these Letters I will be able to encourage native bird watchers in our countries here to also *write* about their field work and increase the knowledge of our rich and wonderful avifauna. **- Dr. Kumar Ghorpade.**

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For more information:
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Rs. 4/3/97

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 71 : March 1997.

PROGRAMME

Rwd 16/2/2001

FIELD OUTING: 16-3-1997: Manjira Barrage: The AP Forest Dept. has kindly agreed to arrange 2 jeeps to take 20 members to Manjira. Members should contact the Hon. Sec., between 8 p.m. & 9 p.m. and leave their names for the trip. Only the first 20 members who register will be accomodated. The starting point is from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta, at 7:30 a.m. sharp. Those desirous of coming directly to Manjira by public transport, may do so, and meet the group at the Barrage around 9:30 a.m. Buses leave Jubilee & Imliban Bus Stands for Manjira (*via* Sangareddi). We request members with personal transportation, willing to accomodate people, to volunteer & inform the Hon. Sec., & make this trip a success for all. This will be a full day trip and members are requested to be prepared with lunch and drinking water. *There has been a hint of a strike by NGOs which might affect the transportation of this trip, in which case, a changed programme will be mailed to members separately.*

NOTES & NEWS

S. Riyazuddin, (*in litt.*) reports the sighting (by his friend) of 50+ Great Indian Bustards *Ardeotis nigriceps* from near Kovelakuntla, 30 km. from Jamalammadugu (72 km. north-west of Cuddapah), where they were seen feeding in ground-nut fields from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. This information has been passed on to the A.P. Forest Department for assessment and action.

Our member, J.V.D. Moorty, has begun writing a weekly column (Saturdays), on birds and birdwatching, for *Andhra Pradesh Times*, since 1-2-1997,. Members are sure to benefit from his efforts, as is the cause of birds!

On her recent trip to India, Mary Peacock, a life-member and well-wisher of the BSAP, donated a pair of binoculars (Zeiss 8x40) to the Society. Members were lucky to have her with them on the field trip of the Society to ICRISAT Asia Centre on 19-1-97, as she is familiar with the birds of this wonderful area. She reported the sighting of a male Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* from here on 16-1-97!

THIS FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 5

An ingenious way of eating the mollusc!

The Australian Sea Gull *Larus/Gabianus pacificus* does have a beak, strong enough to break hard shells of most molluscs found on the beaches of Australia, but this resourceful bird does not believe in taking the trouble. After finding a ollusc in a coral reef, the Australian Sea Gull picks it up, flies with its catch to the neearby rocky cliffs and drops the mollusc from a considerable height. After breaking the shell in such a clever way the Gull swallows the mollusc in one gulp. You find a lot of large mounds of broken shells along the Australian coastline. Upon finding one such large mound of broken shells, which the Gulls took years to build up, the naturalists first thought they have stumbled upon the site of an ancient civilization in which people mainly fed on shellfish! [From Jean Dorst. *The Colourful World of Birds*. Hamlyn. London. 1963. Contributed by Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty].

The need to check poaching of migratory birds at the Pong sanctuary in Himachal Pradesh has recently been stressed upon by a forest officer who has conducted a six-year-long study in the area. It was pointed out that the birds come into direct conflict with locals cultivating the area. [*Down To Earth* 5(18): 10]

The Garrulax corner

- "Where is the India's First Bastard Sanctuary to protect the great Indian Bastard situated?" - From The Civil Services Chronicle, June 1990.
- On the visiting card of a pet shop owner "We Can Supply Breeding Bards & Pats Cocktail Love Birds, Bajreegar, and Canary, Zebra Finches, White Java, & Speeking Parriots." [Both the above items are from *The India Magazine* 17(2): 80. January 1997].
- "Steaked fantail warbler" [*Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 36(6): 106.]

FIELD CRAFT : IDENTIFICATION OF FEMALE & JUVENILE HARRIERS (*Circus* spp.)

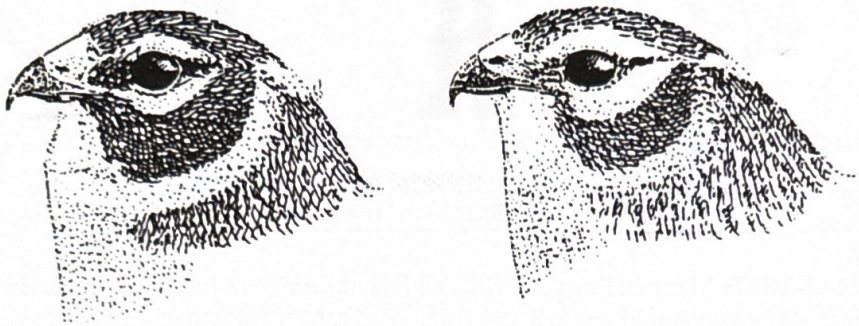

FIGURE 1 Head patterns of juveniles of Pallid *Circus macrours* (left) and Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* (after *Dick Forsman*). Note especialy difference in size of dark cheek-patch, amount of white around eye and distinctiveness and shape of pale collar.

FIGURE 2 General differences in shape between, from left to right, Montagu's *Circus pygargus*, Pallid *C. macrourus* and Hen Harriers *C. cyaneus* (after *Dick Forsman*). Note long, narrow and pointed hand and small body and long tail of Montagu's compared with more triangular-handed and heavier-bodied Pallid. Hen has broadest wings with rounded tip and bulging trailing edge to arm and rather heavy body.

FIGURE 3 Silhouettes of soaring Montagu's *Circus pygargus* / Pallid *C. macrourus* (left) and Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus* (after *Dick Forsman*). Note differences in width of wing and structure of hand/wing-tip. In Hen, whole wing appearing equally broad with rounded tip, whereas wing in Montagu's/Pallid widest at carpal with hand tapering clearly towards tip.

The attention of members, not familiar with the names of a birds' feathers, is drawn to *Pitta* # 11 (Nov. 1988) or any good field guide.

The identification of adult male harriers (*Circus* spp.) is relatively easy and the various plumages are ably illustrated in the field guides available to us in India. It is with females and juveniles that the difficulty arises. Illustrations of these generally brown, 'ringtail' harriers, as they are popularly called, are to say the least, inadequate for field identification. Here we will discuss the features of the two species which are most perplexing.

Ageing: It is easier to separate ringtail Pallid and Montagu's Harriers when they are aged first. Juveniles (Juv) are deep tawny or ochre below with no streaking on breast. They have very dark brown upperparts, with a bright ochre patch on the upperwing-coverts and a striking head pattern. Adult females (Ad. F) are clearly streaked below and more greyish-brown above and their head pattern is less distinct. The underwing patterns are important diagnostic features in various plumages.

Characters	Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*	Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*
Underwing Primary Pattern	**Ad. F:** Barred with even spacing from base to tip, including 'fingers'. Individual bars prominent & squarish. Trailing edge of hand with distinct dark lining merging with broad dark trailing edge of arm. **Juv:** Fingers & trailing edge of hand gen. dark (*v.* pale hand of Pallid). Uniformly greyish 'fingers', on regularly spaced, rather fine barring from base to tip & on darkish trailing edge of hand (*contra* Pallid).	**Ad. F:** Often pale, contrasting clearly against darker secondaries, caused by lack of distinct dark trailing edge & by heaviest barring being confined to median section of each feather. A pale 'boomerang' at base of primaries, surrounding darkish coverts, perhaps most useful single character over great distance. **Juv:** Very much like ad. F.
Underwing Secondary Pattern	**Ad. F:** Have same ground color as primaries, giving whole underwing palish appearance at distance, *important feature*. Typically barred: dark trailing edge separated from inner 2 black wingbars by wide pale gap, similar to underwing pattern of adult male Montagu's. *Importantly*, this pale band distinct & wide from hand to body (*contra* Pallid Harrier). **Juv:** Dark slaty-grey. Gen. darker than in Juv. Pallid.	**Ad. F:** Largely dark, nearly all black secondaries, mostly contrasting sharply with paler primaries. **Juv:** Dark & more distinctly barred than Juv. Montagu's.
Underwing Coverts	**Ad. F:** Pale, with uniform, bold rufous markings creating contrasting 'chess-board'-pattern, continuing onto axillaries.	**Ad. F:** Greater primary coverts oft. standing out as dark crescent surrounding carpal area, feature not found in ad. F. Montagu's.
Axillaries	**Ad. F:** Especially low-flying, boldly barred 'chess-board'-pattern *often providing best single character* as they flash in pace with wing-beats.	**Ad. F:** Armpit usually appearing darkish from distance, lacking distinct pattern of ad. F. Montagu's.
Head Pattern	**Ad. F:** Constantly rather pale & poor in contrast; except for darker, isolated ear-covert patch. White around eye extensive & lores typically pale &, especially in frontal views, whole face looking whitish, giving bird open-faced & mild expression. **Juv:** Oft. quite contrasting & sometimes similar to juv. Pallid. More white around eye, especially above eye, & due to pale lores, eye becomes prominent & surrounded by white. Especially frontal view whole face mostly white (*v.* dark in Pallid). Dark crescent over ear-coverts short, leaving wide white throat. Short crescent-shaped white collar.	**Ad. F:** Very variable. Pale neck-collar always present but often narrow & difficult to see from distance & actually very similar to that of Hen Harrier. **Juv:** White around eye reduced (*contra* Montagu's). Ear covert patches more extensive, mostly reaching half-way out along lower mandible. In flight, dark cheeks visible from below, leaving only narrow pale throat. Collar often circling head completely. Dark lores making face darkish, with a grim expression *v.* mild of Montagu's.
Upperwing	**Ad. F:** Remiges often appearing greyish with darker barring, especially on hand. Distinct dark wing-bar across clearly greyish secondaries always clear indication of Ad. F. Montagu's.	**Ad. F:** Mostly darker than ad. Montagu's & barring of remiges more difficult to see. Often contrast between brownish primaries & slightly darker secondaries can be seen.
Underparts	**Juv:** Deep copper-brown or yellowish-ochre. Faint streaking on upper-breast *v.* no streaks on Pallid.	**Juv:** Typically unstreaked warm yellowish-ochre. Copper brown birds not known.
Breast Streaking	**Ad. F:** Lanceolated & rather broad rufous-tinged streaks, similarly shaped & evenly spaced over whole breast.	**Ad. F:**
Outer Rectrices	**Ad. F:** Showing diagnostic, vividly rufous-red bars on paler sandy ground colour, *v.* dark barring of all Pallids & juv. Montagu's.	**Ad. F:** Bars of outer rectrices dark, not rufous, as in Ad. F. Montagu's.
Flight Silhouette	Long, narrow & pointed hand, small body & long tail.	Comparatively more triangular-handed & heavier-bodied.
Jizz	**Ad. F:** Id. usually straight-forward if the pattern of the underwing & axillaries is seen. Rather uniform, lacking contrasts, & the wings appear pale below with a darkish head. Small-bodied, strikingly long-tailed & long- & narrow-handed & the flight is light & graceful. **Juv:** All-dark 'fingers', oft. with uniformly greyish bases to outer primaries.	**Ad. F:** More contrasty, with darkish upperparts & paler underparts, & the underwing is clearly bi-coloured, with a dark arm & pale hand. Streaking heavy on upper-breast, contrasting with a paler lower-breast & belly. Primary pattern is rather constant & provides the single most reliable distinguishing character. Also the secondary pattern is a distinguishing character in most Ad. Fs.

Source: Dick Forsman (1995): Field identification of female and juvenile Montagu's and Pallid Harriers. ***Dutch Birding***. 17: 41-54.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST - 5

"Enough general collecting has been done; concentration on filling in the gaps in our knowledge is now needed. Those who wish to help in the work should first familiarise themselves with what has been accomplished and learn what remains to be done. With some species the distribution.....still needs to be worked out.....the greatest need of all is accurate observations on status and migration. In this all can help. Keep full notes for a year on the birds of your station, noting those that are resident and the times of arrival and departure, comparative abundance and scarcity of all the migratory kinds; and you will have made a contribution to ornithology that will in the measure of its accuracy and fullness be a help to every other worker." (Hugh Whistler, *Popular Handbook of Indian Birds*, 1928)

In November-December (Letter #2), I suggested that enthusiastic and competent members of the B.S.A.P. could concentrate on the 28 Districts named as occurring on the Deccan Plateau (in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka) principally, along with 11 other Districts of A.P. in the Andhra Carnatic, Rayalseema, and also the Northern Circars. Here, I will briefly note what is known of the birds and the flora of these four biogeographical (and socio-cultural) zones, to aid the understanding of bird watchers and naturalists who decide on "filling in the gaps in our knowledge" of the biodiversity of this area.

Whistler's Introduction to his book, from which I have quoted above, will enable any educated reader to grasp the *basics* of bird watching. Similarly, the Introduction in Rev. Father Cecil Saldanha's *Flora of Karnataka* (1984, Vol. 1, pp. 1-24, maps) is very well written and should give a reasonably clear idea about the Botany of the dry deciduous and thorn 'forest' types prevalent in the tracts south of the Godavari River. The three Districts (now four, and with Yanam of Pondicherry) of the Northern Circars are biogeographically very alien to the other 36, as mentioned earlier, and need to be treated separately.

All reasonably honest bird watchers must endeavour to learn about and slowly master the *Natural History* "of their own localities", if they really hope to understand the lives of the birds that are their main objects of interest. A Zoologist must know his Botany and *vice versa*, if not the geology and climatology of his area as well. Only then will the ecology (science of inter-relationships) and biogeography be even remotely comprehensible. Knowledge of only *one* of the kinds of life, and the elements that make them what they are, is *no* knowledge. It is a pity that most 'modern' methods of dealing with Science (or even Arts) are so divisive and fragmented, unlike the cohesive, holistic attitudes of the Victorian era or earlier, which produced accomplished naturalists who have given us the very foundation of our current obsession. At least biological science graduates would benefit immensely by acquiring and consulting Barry Cox & Peter Moore's extremely scholarly and eminently readable book, *Biogeography: An Ecological And Evolutionary Approach* (1980, 3rd edn, 234 pp.).

Too much detail cannot be included in these Letters, which will only try to impart the bare minimum of information and comment on subjects or issues of interest to the readers of *Pitta*. A paper by Krishna Raju and others (1988, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 84: 605-619, maps) gives background data about the status of habitats and wildlife in A.P., worth consulting. They cite a few major references on A.P. birds and plants, especially some papers included in the Proceedings of a National Seminar on the Eastern Ghats held at Waltair in 1984. A paper by Gadgil & Meher-Homji, presented in 1982 at Bangalore during a Workshop on Biological Diversity, gives very useful data on the 42 vegetation types of India. Three of these, *Tectona grandis-Terminalia tomentosa-Anogeissus latifolia, Hardwickia binata-Albizia amara-Anogeissus latifolia*, and *Albizia amara-Acacia* spp., occur over most of the areas south of the Tapti-Penganga-Godavari Rivers, and east of the Western Ghats, in the 36 Districts located here. In the other three Districts of A.P. north of the Godavari, however, two other vegetation types dominate: *Terminalia tomentosa-Anogeissus latifolia-Cleistanthus collinus* and *Toona ciliata-Garuga pinnata*.

There are some 20 protected areas notified in A.P., which is supposed to have 18% of its geographical area under forests. For Telengana and other areas on the Deccan Plateau, two useful papers by a former Osmania University Professor of Botany, Sayeedud-Din, deal with some 425 species of 'common flowering plants' of the erstwhile Hyderabad State, both native and introduced (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1938, 40: 191-212, map; 1941, 42: 903-924). For the coastal Andhra Carnatic, papers by Sastry & Rao (1973, *Rec. Bot. Surv. India*, 15: 92-107) and by Venkanna (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1991, 88: 47-54) are helpful. For Rayalseema, the 320 spp. of vascular plants, from the Venkatagiri Hills and their environs on the Velikonda Range, treated by Suryanarayana (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1980, 76:240-258) perhaps are representative of the flora there as is Ellis' *Flora of the Nallamalais* (1987, Vol. 1). For the Northern Circars, papers by Seshagiri Rao (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1959, 55: 429-449, maps; 1964, 61: 303-329 - 893 spp.) and by Srinivasan & Subba Rao (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1961, 58: 155-170, 407-419, map - 286 spp.) should provide reliable data on the flora there. University Botany Department staff, and offices of the Conservator of Forests, could also be approached for additional and *specific* floristic data on particular plants, habitats or areas. The District Gazetteers are good sources of basic information and the *Atlas of Forest Resources of India* (edited by S.P. Das Gupta, 1976, National Atlas Organization, Calcutta) is excellent.

Publications on the Ornithology of these 39 Districts in the three States are several. The ANDHRA CHECKLIST by Taher & Pittie (1989, 456 spp.), and the VIZAG CHECKLIST by Krishna Raju (1985, 300 spp.), are updated and comprehensive basic sources, and provide the major works on A.P. birds also. The PITTIE INDEX (1995, pp. 2-4, 18-25) cites more than 100 references on this State's Avifauna (and more of the other two States too), and Salim Ali & Whistler's Hyderabad State Survey (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1933-1934, 1938, Vols. 36-37, 40, map - 298 spp.) is still the best database on Deccan Plateau birds. Of course, Whistler & Kinnear's 17-part report on the Eastern Ghats Ornithological Survey (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 1930, 1932-1937, Vols. 34-39) cannot be overlooked for any study of the birds of the Peninsula. Pushp Kumar, former P.C.C.F., wrote a 16-part report of original data on A.P. birds in *Mayura* (1980-1986, Vols 1-6, incomplete), and the ten volumes of this 'Newsletter' plus the 70 issues of *Pitta* (1987-1997) carry much information also. I have a list of more than 100 references on A.P. Ornithology included in the *N.F.B.* (Dec. 1960 to Jan. 1997, Vols 1-37), and can provide literature sources on the birds of the 19 other Districts on the Deccan Plateau in Maharashtra and Karnataka, from my working files, to bird watchers who may need them.

I may mention here that the only papers (all in *J.B.N.H.S.*) on the butterflies of peninsular A.P. available are by Lt.-Col. W.E.M. Logan Home (1935, 37: 892-894 - 70 spp. taken "with in a radius of 10 miles of the Secunderabad Club"), D.F. Sanders [1936, 38: 800-802 - 46 other spp. "taken.....in and around Hyderabad (Deccan)"] and A.E.G. Best (1954, 52: 365-373; 1977, 74: 189-190 - 117 spp. collected on the Nagalapuram Hills which "extend for about 30 miles from south to north, the southernmost end being about 40 miles NW. of Madras City"). Subba Reddi and Meera Bai listed the butterflies of Visakhapatnam in an *A.P.N.H.S.* Special Issue of *Kingfisher* (1985, pp. 1-2 - 46 spp. taken in the city). - **Dr. Kumar Ghorpade.**

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For more information write to: **Hon.Sec:**Rajiv Mathew, 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad 500482. Ph: 310721. **Editors:** Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 72 : April 1997

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 20-4-1997: Nehru Zoological Park : Members are requested to meet at the ticket counter outside the zoo at 7:30 a.m. This will be a half day trip.

EDITORIAL

It has become our culture to estimate the 'value' of everything on earth. Not the intrinsic value in a macro sense, but its value, its worth, within *our* scheme of things. I would like to share with you three incidents from last month, which illustrate graphically the value of birds and their study.

The first was an almost miraculous arrival of a visitor on a flowering Coral Tree *Erythrina indica* in my garden. On hearing a mysterious metallic jangling call one morning, I rushed to the window. A solitary Hair-crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus* perched at the base of a blood-red coral flower, its dazzling black plumage reflecting the sunlight in the most incredible sheen of blue and green I have seen on anything larger than a Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* in breeding plumage. It was there for 2 days, tasting the nectar from each and every blossom, with perhaps a savory insect now and then – lording it over the other aves (Roseringed Parakeets, Common Mynas, even a Coucal) as though it ruled the roost here every day! I consider this happening a miracle only because we do not know enough about the movements of this bird and others like it. It exists in a narrow range extending from the lower Himalayas, through NE India, down the Eastern Ghats, across the states of A.P., T.N., Kerala and western Karnataka and then along the western ghats complex – wandering seasonally in search of its staple of flower-nectar. If records of sightings (date and site) are kept by birdwatchers throughout the country, we would easily be able to shed more light on the distribution and local migration pattern of this bird. In and around Hyderabad we see it only during the months of February-April – which is also when the various species of *Erythrina* blossom. During which parts of the year are these birds seen in the rest of the country? Will someone volunteer to collate data on the species, and other such small species, generally overshadowed by more glamorous and visible larger ones?

The second incident happened as a result of a casual, off-the-cuff desire to go birding at the end of a long day in office. At 5 p.m. we (both the editors) drove down the new road being laid along the western edge of Hussain Sagar, a tank in the middle of Hyderabad city. At the end of the road (end because it is not complete and so does not link to any other road) we stopped the car and got out. Spread before us, in the least disturbed corner of the *sagar*, was a phenomenal flotilla of Shovellers *Anas clypeata*. Almost 5000 strong, they comprised 99% of the duck species present. The males were resplendent in their breeding plumage, their white chests shining in the lowering sun. The margin of the *sagar*, between where we stood and the edge of the water, was carpeted with short stubble grass and almost desiccated, occasional clumps of *Prosopis*. On this strip of land frolicked what seemed like hundreds and hundreds of wagtails! Enough numbers of birds in mind-boggling assortment of plumages – to rattle the teeth of world-class wagtail buffs! All were surely congregating for the migration to their breeding grounds. But there was a serious flaw in this picture. The whole place reeked of sewage and effluent. The water was a lifeless soupy slush slapping into the edge of land in listless, offensive wavelets. The air pressed heavily upon us, pregnant with nauseous vapors of the city's malodorous pollution. What struck me was that these birds, waterfowl, wagtails, waders and swallows were all feeding upon vegetation and insects which thrived in these polluted surroundings. Unwittingly, they will carry our pollutants in their tissues, almost ensuring the weakening of their genes and eradication of their progeny in the future. Next year another flock will come, perhaps the same birds, perhaps not. The cycle will repeat itself, but we may not know its consequences at all till it is too late. We will lack the data to prove where the pollutants came from for these birds have a playing-field which spans the world. This tragedy not withstanding, we cannot even imagine, least of all predict, the far-reaching ecological ramifications of such callousness on our part. If such be the case, then let us at least have the foresight to comprehend the early warning signals of Nature and use them for our benefit! The reader's eye is drawn to the pelican die-off news in the 'Notes & News' column elsewhere in this bulletin.

.....(*continued on page 4*)

NOTES & NEWS

In honour of Dr. Salim Ali, "The Indian Academy of Sciences (IAS) has launched a project named '**Lifescape**'. Lifescape will involve the preparation of between 2500 to 5000 illustrated accounts of the entire spectrum of the diversity of Indian life, from bacilli and beetles to birds, from mushrooms and mosquitoes to mammals, from seaweeds and starfishes to turtles. It is hoped that these accounts would serve three purposes; to create broader awareness of the country's living wealth, to facilitate monitoring India's lifescape thereby promoting conservation efforts, and to enhance the quality of science education by encouraging the study of living organisms at first hand. The IAS would like to involve all nature lovers of Indian in paying our respects to the memory of Salim Ali through this celebration of the diversity of Indian life. The Academy therefore proposes to prepare these accounts in a preparatory fashion, to be written and reviewed by all of us who have been interested in observing plants, animals, micro-organisms at first hand, in their natural setting. All participants would of course be given full credit in the final publication." Interested persons may send their full address, taxonomic group of interest and geographical areas of familiarity to Prof. Madhav Gadgil, Biodiversity Unit, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Jakkur P.O., Bangalore 560064.

THIS FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 6

Phosphorescent Mouths !

The Weaverbirds *Ploceus philippinus* are known for their intricately woven retort-shaped nests. The Social Weaverbirds *Philetairus socius* have a nest with one hundred to three hundred compartments. The young weaverbirds live in closed nests in which there is almost total darkness. Their parents would have much difficulty in finding the beaks of their little ones and filling them with food, if Nature had not lined the edges of their beaks with rims of bright yellow and placed pustules of brilliant colour, red or yellow, in their throat cavities. These reflect and shine intensely in the shadows, making effective signaling devices which guide the parents directly to their children's beaks. Wise are thy ways, mama Natura ! [From: Jean Dorst (1963): *The Colourful World of Birds*. Hamlyn. London. (Contributed by Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty)].

The **first birdwatching fair** in the country concluded in Rajasthan on Sunday with environmentalists and conservationists calling for creating awareness among masses against neglect of wetlands. People should realize that saving of wetlands – the most fertile ecosystems – was in their own interest and they should create "pressure groups" to force government to take up proper management of the water bodies, opined the participants of a workshop, organized on the bank of Jal Mahal lake. [*The Asian Age*, 3 February 1997].

The **Bird Link Society** (BLS) was formed in January 1997 by Bikram Grewal, "as a society linking persons and organizations concerned with the conservation of birds and their habitat in South Asia." BLS aims to:

- organize itself into a dynamic and effective forum to save birds and protect their habitat.
- tackle the issue of people and bird habitat: eco-development and protected areas.
- involve itself in prioritizing research, monitoring and data collection.
- monitor the control of poaching and trade in wildlife.
- create awareness through media campaigns.
- impart education.
- explore avenues of legal action for the protection of habitats and birds.
- make eco-tourism into a constructive force.
- network through printed media.
- sponsor awards for outstanding work in the study or conservation of birds and their habitat.

For further information and assistance please contact: Bikram Grewal, 101/4 Kaushalya Park, Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110016.

Dr. S Balachandran has "planned to undertake a survey for the two threatened species of waders names the **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* and **Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* between Chilka Lake and Pulicat Lake during March, when they are on their way back to the breeding grounds." He requires information on important wader haunts along the coast of Andhra Pradesh to be surveyed as potential haunts of these birds. Information may be sent to the editors, for forwarding to him.

As of mid-September, more than 10,000 birds have been found dead at the Salton Sea in California. The die-off is attributed to avian botulism, and the dead birds include at least 6,500 white pelicans and 1,000 brown pelicans. (Brown pelicans are endangered in California.) This is now the largest **pelican die-off** in United States history. It is presumed that tilapia, an introduced fish, are the source of the disease; botulism has been found in 40 percent of the dead fish recovered. Early results also reveal that about 10 percent of the live fish are carrying the toxin. The information was posted on the Internet by Linda Glaser, Wildlife Disease Specialist with the National Wildlife health Center. [Eirik Blom (1997): Quick Takes. *Birdwatcher's Digest* 19(3): 10-17.]

We congratulate Mr. **Zafar Futehally** for having been nominated the first recipient of the Salim Ali International Award for Nature Conservation in recognition of his outstanding contribution and achievement in the field of nature conservation. He is the founder and editor of the popular *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, which is being published non-stop since 1961!

....,...(*continued on page 4*)

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST - 6

"I am strongly induced to believe that, as in music, the person who understands every note will, if he also possesses a proper taste, more thoroughly enjoy the whole, so he who examines each part of a fine view, may also thoroughly comprehend the full and combined effect. Hence, a traveller should be a botanist, for in all views plants form the chief embellishment."
(Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the 'Beagle'*, 1845)

My belief is that bird watchers who look only for and at these beautiful feathered creatures, and see nothing else, are going about the study of Natural History in quite the wrong manner. Charles Darwin, who was a Victorian and also an optimistic, human, kindly and likeable individual by nature, became the complete sedentary scholar, almost the recluse, after marrying and settling down in a large and comfortable country home, 'Down House', in Kent, about 25 Km from London, having already had his great formative experience around the globe, on the H.M.S. Beagle, as a naturalist for almost five years, when in his twenties. Darwin had always been a great reader, scholar and lonely thinker and, at his country house, he made use of this experience in a highly individual way, which was with a slowness, a carefulness and thoroughness that was quite phenomenal. Darwin felt it was "absurd to talk of one animal being higher than another", and his *Journal of Researches* (1839) was a history of his voyage on the 'Beagle', and a sketch of his observations in Natural History and Geology during his travels.

The Rev. John Henslow, Professor of Botany, was his mentor while at Cambridge, and the Rev. F.W. Hope his 'master in Entomology'. Other men important in his life and work were T.H. Huxley the biologist, T.R. Malthus the economist, Sir Charles Lyell the geologist, and Sir Joseph Hooker the botanist, whose seven volumes of *The Flora of British India* (1872-1897) have still not been revised for almost a century here. This anecdote, of the man whose theory of 'evolution by natural selection' changed our thinking from the middle of the last century, is presented here only so we realize the importance of looking at Nature *in its entirety*, and not putting forth excuses about the lack of time or interest, but, even then professing a great 'knowledge' and understanding of our 'environment', and the urgency of 'conservation' of birds or other forms of life. Incidentally, in his mid-forties, Darwin began breeding pigeons on his estate and bought and kept every known breed available in England.

By 'locking up' what we assume are geographical areas of high biodiversity ('Hot Spots'), without also *studying* the entirety of their floral and faunal inhabitants (at least the Birds, Butterflies and Botany), is like putting the 'cart before the horse' and hoping the horse will survive, hale and hearty, without any problems. How will the birds we care for so much thrive, or why will migrant species arrive regularly and in great numbers, if there is little *food* for them here, or *habitats* without human encroachment and disturbance? By food I mean both plant and animal (mainly insect) resources – do we really know what exactly our bird species eat? Why, for example, do we hope our pelicans will increase in numbers and breed like they used to do, if we do not realize that the kinds of wetlands, with abundant fish swimming in them, have been destroyed or over-utilized by us? And who is going to *study* what needs to be researched about our wildlife, if we are to have any chance of educating and then persuading our people, and the governments, to protect our biodiversity and the immense natural genetic wealth that is still little understood and utilized by us?

The whole point is this. If we humans are going to become a predominantly *urban* species, like our demographic statistics indicate, we will need vast natural resources, besides agricultural production, to survive in the concrete jungles that create much pollution (physical and mental!). We are also being forced to adopt an *artificial*, complicated life-style and an urban (not 'western') consumer economy. Nature Study (that's what Biology was called during my school days) teaches us how to live a simple and satisfying life, by disciplining our behaviour and needs, in tune with the energy and resources available. We must control our populations and give more importance to the *quality of life*, rather than just to the making of this thing called money (that only we have invented, and which rules and ruins our lives), if we are to have any semblance of a chance to survive and delay extinction.

Unless there is a *reversal* of our living patterns (as is known to have occurred in other life forms on earth earlier) and we humans take to the countryside in greater numbers, stop having so many children, go back to using 'organic' food and reduce our dependence on machines, non-renewable resources and sources of energy, etc., Nature will *not* go on providing us what it has done so far, and will make us suffer terribly for our greed and ignorance very soon. This 'sustainable development' idea is something with no logic or backbone. When we begin to realize, that *everything* we make or use is dependent on the *natural resources*, over which we will never have control (even the money we print or mint), and that once the forests and fresh water are almost gone we have little hope in being able to survive only on our plantations and crops, only then can mankind begin to believe in a future. In this dream we hold on to, of the poor getting rich and the rich getting richer, we are only fooling ourselves. *Nature will survive*, it is only ourselves we should be concerned about.

It is only after we evolved our so-called technology, following an industrial revolution, forsaking our hunter-gatherer and even agricultural life-styles, that the bird diversity and that of every other kind of life slowly began disappearing from earth. As Ruskin Bond writes, he has "come to the heretical conclusion that there is more bird life in the

cities than there is in the hills and forests around our hill-stations." In his short article on 'Bird life in the City' he ends "In the long run, it is the 'common man', and not the scientist and conservationist, who can best give protection to the birds and animals living around him. Religious sentiment has helped preserve the peacock and few other birds. It is a pity that so many other equally beautiful birds do not enjoy the same protection. But the wily crow, the cheeky sparrow, and the sensible myna, will always be with us. Quite possibly they will survive the human species. An it is the same with other animals. While the cringing jackal has learnt the art of survival, his master, the magnificent tiger, is on his way to extinction."

– Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé

....(*continued from page 1*) The third incident is a result of the Society's trip to Manjira Barrage (within Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary, Medak District) on 16-3-1997. Twenty members went on this field trip, braving a blazing sun (temp. *c.* 40°C), assisted by the Forest Department of A.P., which provided 2 jeeps for transportation and a boat ride on the reservoir. By far, the greatest attraction of this trip was the teeming heronry in the middle of the reservoir. While on the barrage, we had no inkling of the thrill that awaited us – a short boat-ride away. Before we embarked in the boat, an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* entertained us with its act of dive-fishing and mid-air shudder to get rid of water from its plumage! As we approached the small island, comprising mainly of *Prosopis* sp. and *Ipomea* sp., the din of nesting waterbirds rent the air. Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala* were by far the most abundant. We counted 350 birds, even as the DFO, Mr. Sankaran, mentioned that their numbers increased towards evening and that at least 1500-2000 birds were present! We could not see beyond the periphery of the island and may have missed whatever was in the middle. Nesting activity was in full swing. Birds were building, feeding chicks, incubating, protecting with fanned wings, squabbling, soaring, etc. Their nests had 2-3 downy white chicks with black bills, which called loudly when alone in the nest. There were also the three species of cormorants (*Phalacrocorax* sp.), 8 Darters *Anhinga melanogaster*, of which one was sitting on the edge of a nest which contained a chick in white down! One immature bird with whitish plumage on head and neck was also seen. Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* hid within the *Ipomea* stands, nesting here and there. Both adults and immature birds were present. Grey Herons and Large, Median and Little Egrets (Ardeidae) were also nesting. Some egrets fanned their plumes to many an exclamation of wonder from members. In February 1989, 3 painted stork nests with 2 chicks each, were observed on this island. This situation deteriorated in the next couple of years due to some maintenance problem with the flood-gates and water being drained totally from the reservoir. The island was not protected by water any more and so was vandalized by wood-cutters and grazers – the heronry was totally destroyed. The resurrection of this heronry is indeed a miracle. It is a little monument to the tenacity of life. Given 'half a chance', Nature will survive. It needs just that much. The water in the reservoir is clean and supports healthy vegetation. It seems to have body, substance and life. The air is wholesome and breathable.

What are the 'benefits' we can derive from these observations? The first obviously is the opportunity for study. Bird study is still in its infancy in India and needs to be taken more seriously by the birdwatching fraternity – amateurs, students, researchers, etc. The second incident illustrates a deteriorating habitat and indicates consequences. Here is a chance for not only study – cause and effect of environmental pollution, using birds as indicators of the quality of the habitat – but also action through environmental planning (which is in effect, planning for our future) and the resulting work of implementation of the conservation measures suggested. The third situation is almost idealistic. Here again is the chance to study and record Nature s cycle in undisturbed surroundings as a template for future reference. The chance to usher tourism and its attendant monetary benefits. The chance to educate people about the veracity of birds being indicators of environmental viability. Those who understand this will also realize that birds are as 'valuable' as all other life forms on earth.

.....(*continued from page 2*) Mr. Claude Chappuis, an eminent French ornithologist, is presently working on recording bird calls and songs of African birds for the British Museum Sound Library. In this connection he is keen to record the calls and songs of the **Indian Grey Creeper** ***Salpornis spilonotus spilonotus***. A bird of open deciduous *Acacia* sp. and teak forests or mango groves in the plains and hills. It seems to be scarce and patchily distributed in the central Indian region. There is only one record from Andhra Pradesh [Kotapalli, Adilabad District (Majumdar, 1984)]. If anyone has a confirmed record of this bird from Andhra Pradesh particularly or any other place in India, please inform Mr. Siraj Taher, (2/B Atlas Apartments, Road No. 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034. Tel: 040-3312607), with details of the exact location of the area, mentioning the route to the place.

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For more information write to: **Hon.Sec:**Rajiv Mathew, 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad 500482. Ph: 3310721. **Editors:** Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 73 : May 1997

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 25-5-1997: Sanjivayya Park : Members are requested to meet at the main gate at 7:30 a.m. This will be a half day trip.

NOTES & NEWS

An immature specimen of the highly endangered endemic bustard, the **Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*** was seen in ICRISAT Asia Centre, Patancheru, **Medak District, Andhra Pradesh** (17°31'N, 78°16'E) by our member, Dr Tom Hash, on 31st March 1997. Around 10.00 hrs he was in an area of *Jowar*, *Bajra* and chick-pea fields when the bird flew up from one of the fields and settled down much further away. On being informed of this exciting find, some members of the BSAP visited the area on 6th April 1997. Driving down to the same spot, they spread out and combed the fields methodically and were rewarded with a sighting of the bird! It flew up from a chick-pea field, gaining height rapidly (flying into the sun), till it reached c. 30'-40' when it turned in a semi-circle, disappearing over some buildings. Another sighting of the lesser florican has been reported from near Chikode village near Siddipet in Dubak Mandal (18°20'N, 78°40'E) of Medak district on 26-2-1997 by the staff of the A.P. Forest Department. The first sighting of this species, in recent years, from near Hyderabad was on 1-11-1984 from Indresham village (17°34'N, 78°16'E) near Patancheru [Taher, S. (1985): Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* found in Medak District, Andhra Pradesh. *Mayura* 5(4): 77-79.]

THIS FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 7

Migration? We Prefer Hibernation!

The small, grey, Poorwill *Phalaenoptilus nuttallii* is found in the western United States. It is one of the species of nightjars belonging to the family Caprimulgidae (derived from the Latin thus: *capra* – goat and *mulgere* – milk). The Poorwill is so called for its tri-syllabic, incessant call, emphasized on the third syllable *whip-poor-WILL* unlike the *chuck-chuck-chuck-r-r-r* of the Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*.

Caprimulgidae are crepuscular (active during the twilight conditions of dawn and dusk) or nocturnal birds, a perfect specimen of nature's camouflaging techniques. They are not easy to spot. But an experienced birder cannot miss their incessant calls in the evening and just before dawn.

Caprimulgidae are found all over the world, except Antarctica. They have large eyes; a mottled and vermiculated grey-brown plumage; long wings and a long tail – quite a complicated camouflaging pattern. A small bill, capable of being opened wide, and bordered by bristles that tend to funnel insects towards the mouth, are characteristics of this family. Their flight is peculiarly moth-like – silent and wandering – long sailing glides alternated with a somewhat leisurely flapping of the wings. *continued on page 2.*

"Richard Liversidge of the MacGregor Museum, Kimberley, South Africa, has just described a new species of large pipit that winters in the Kimberley area, but for which the breeding grounds are still unknown (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 116:211-215). The new species, **Long-tailed Pipit *Anthus longicaudatus***, is currently known only from the Kimberley area, where it occurs during the austral winter." It is readily distinguished from closely resembling pipit species by, among other things, "a single (as opposed to disyllabic) call note, and rather wagtail-like jizz. ... Additionally, playback experiments appeared to confirm the distinctiveness of the taxon." [King, Jon (1997): OmithoNews. *Birding World* 10(2): 42.].

"The Victorian Wader Study Group of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union (RAOU) has captured a juvenile **Common Tern** that has broken new records by flying what is believed to be the longest documented jour- ney of any bird in the world – over 26,000 km from its nest in Finland to coastal Victoria, in south-eastern Australia. It was caught on 24th January (1997) on a beach near the RAOU's Rotamah Island Bird Observatory on the Gippsland Lakes, after being ringed as a chick in its nest on an island in a lake in central Finland on 30th

continued from page 1

Now back to the Poorwill. This is the only bird in the world known to prefer hibernation over migration. While many of its summer companions choose to leave the country during winter, the Poorwill shuns migration and prefers to squeeze itself into a hole in a rock, its head turned towards the dark inside. Then it falls into a deep slumber, during which all its heart and respiratory functions stop! Its temperature drops from 40°C to 20°C (104°F to 68°F) exactly as does that of a Marmot *Marmota monax* during winters. The Poorwill appears to be dead, but actually is in a state of lethargy – by-passing the pains of migration – and as soon as the rays of the spring sun start warming it emerges from the long sleep.

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(Contributed by Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty).

June 1996. Since it would not have flown until two weeks after ringing, its speed of travel may have been close to 200 km per day! [Anon. (1997): Pigeonhole. *Birding World* 10(2): 80.]

It is time that governments and corporations took account of the free services provided by nature, which are worth many thousands of billions of dollars a year, urged a panel of US scientists and economists at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) at Seattle recently. "In order to protect the environment in the next century, we have to give an economic value to nature's 'ecosystem services' ranging from water purification and waste recycling to soil fertility and insect pollination," said Jane Lubchenco, president of the AAAS. "Preliminary evaluation puts the **cost of natural resources** and services at or above the total gross national product (GNP) of the planet, to the tune of US $30,000 billion," revealed Geoffrey Heal of Columbia Business School, New York. According to Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University, California, the value of natural biological pest control systems alone amount to four percent of world GNP. He added that the US forest service should take into account the value of standing forests, which serve as natural flood controls, while calculating fees for felling trees. [*Down To Earth* (1997), 5(21): 6].

The growing consumption of **coffee** is causing serious damage to the environment. Escalating demand for coffee might be directly responsible for global environmental problems such as the depletion of migratory **songbirds**, whose numbers have dropped by nearly half in recent years. Jeffrey Parrish, a fellow with the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Farmers in South America are giving up the old method of growing beans in the shade of tropical rainforests. Instead, they are clearing the forests for growing beans in the sunlight for higher yield. This, Parrish noted, entails increased use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and also contributes to the loss of species and biodiversity, besides global warming.... He urged consumers to buy organic coffee, which is grown according to traditional methods. [*Down To Earth* (1997), 5(21): 6]. *Ed. Note: A very similar change is being brought about in India by the switch-over from natural vegetation to coffee, and similar cash crops which need heavy use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Coffee and tea estates may look full of green cover but the destruction of natural habitat may be detrimental to the avian species of the area.*

Members of the Madras Naturalists' Society took part in a bird count at **Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary** on 2nd March 1997. "A total of 12,683 birds (22 species) were counted in the 3 hour period – 15.45 hrs to 18.45 hrs. The total includes over 8,400 birds counted in flight as they came in to roost, as well as nocturnal species like Night Herons, ducks, etc., which were counted as they flew out to feed at dusk. The highlight of this year's count was the presence of nearly 250 **Grey Pelicans** and over 180 **Painted Storks** which were seen nesting in the sanctuary after a gap of nearly 10 years. Several Glossy Ibis were also seen this year, though we could not ascertain if they were nesting (there are no records of this bird nesting here so far)." [*Madras Naturalists' Society Bulletin* April 1997].

A **tiger census** will be conducted throughout the country on 14 and 15 May 1997. The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department is commencing the exercise on 9th May 1997, with preliminary reconnaissance surveys from 9-13 May 1997 and the actual census on 14 & 15 May, to coincide with the rest of the country. Members of the Society have been invited by the A.P. Forest Department to participate in the census on a voluntary basis. Travel expenses to and from the site will have to be borne by the volunteers. Volunteers are free to select areas they would like to visit, but are requested to intimate the department well in advance to facilitate logistics. The forest department will make arrangements for stay and food. Interested members may contact Mr A V Joseph, Conservator of Forests, Wildlife Management, at the office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, A.P.F.D., Saifabad, or the Honorary Secretary of the Society for further details.

Last month's editorial elicited a welcome response from the Honorary Secretary of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). Referring to the relationship between the **haircrested drongo** and **flowering trees**, especially coral and silk cotton, he has sent a list of the specimens of this bird in the collection of the BNHS, along with the date and area of collection. This is a good starting point for a small project about this relationship. Members could help by sending in their sightings of the haircrested drongo along with name of site (details like coordinates, nearest large town, etc. would be helpful) and the date of observation. Notes on whether the bird was sighted on a flowering tree would be wonderful. Dates (period) of flowering trees and nesting birds, by themselves, also would be useful. Please write to the editor.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST – 7

"If these conclusions are trite – as I warned they would be – it is because they are common-sense conclusions already reached by common people.

Three further comments may be useful. First, activists sometimes seem to want to suppress ideas – for example, the idea that violence is inherent in us, in part inherited from hunting ancestors – because they think the ideas are dangerous. But surely it is better to face danger and try to counter it than to turn one's back on it; even the jackal in Kipling's *The Undertakers* knew this. Second, misunderstanding other person's motives is one of the commonest causes of trouble among human beings; it is the principal reason why older and younger generations do not understand each other; and it is conspicuous in arguments between conventional and activist scientists. And third, common people can at least try to evaluate arguments among scientists not only by the merits of the cases but also by the way the cases are presented."

(P.J.Darlington Jr, *Evolution for Naturalists: the simple principles and complex reality*, 1980)

I am a conventional scientist, more correctly put an old-fashioned naturalist, who has always been enthralled and curious about every other form of life this planet is now home to, besides also being interested in species that once were and are no more here. Birds have been my 'first love' for more than forty years, then insects fascinated and helped me with my academic career and now I realize that a knowledge of our flora is also very essential for a real understanding of the natural world. Having 'graduated' from gun to binoculars to insect net, it is the ***living*** plant diversity that excites my concern currently on outdoor walks, and I am botanizing in the field, with an eye on the insect and other animal associations, especially the avifauna, of our native (and introduced) flora.

Four decades of nature study in classrooms, laboratories, libraries and museums, apart from basic field work which I enjoy most, has made me arrive at a few of my own personal conclusions which I wish to share with you. My earlier Letters would have brought home my conviction that we native Indians have never really been seriously inquisitive about Nature and its treasures, except with an ***utilitarian*** motive. Nearly all of the discovery and documentation of our floral and faunal wealth has been carried out by non-Indian men and women, mostly amateurs. I believe that unless a substantial section of our society, especially youngsters, begins to take a non-utilitarian, very matter-of-fact (if not ***scientific***) interest in our wildlife, especially relations with and of plant species, any hope of us understanding and 'conserving' the natural world is only going to be a pipe dream. Fear of the unknown, and ignorance of the real wealth of our biodiversity in the remaining wildernesses, has resulted in the massive destruction of the natural resources that we also depend on. Knowledge acquired through our superlative, incomparable ***brain*** is what is desperately required, not just 'love' or concern by way of our ***heart***, so that our co-habitors that are rapidly becoming extinct, because of our greed and stupidity, can be recognized, studied and then 'saved.'

Unless 'common' people, with the learned help of qualified and experienced field biologists and naturalists, ***prove*** to our empowered brothers and sisters (in the government and in business) the ***real value*** of protecting still undisturbed ***ecosystems*** (the targeting of the Giant Panda or the Tiger has not helped much) for their genetic wealth, which is imperative for our own comfortable survival, none of them are going to bother, ***until it is too late***. What we ***urgently*** need is a Forest Protection Force, including trained Wildlife Wardens and native tribals, to patrol the boundaries (and interiors) of notified biodiversity reserves, prevent unauthorized entry by any of us, and so help protect the animals and plants that still thrive in these wildernesses. What we ***also*** require, and is sadly of low priority nowadays, are authorized biologists and naturalists to be given permission, funds and infrastructure to conduct ***research*** on the taxonomy, biology and ecology (primarily) of the floral and faunal species that these protected reserves hold, and then for us to benefit from the results of their studies, which must be published and available to all.

Writers like Rudyard Kipling, Jim Corbett, Thomas Caverhill Jerdon, Allan Octavian Hume, E.C. Stuart Baker, E.H. Aitken, R.W. Hingston, Frank Kingdon-Ward, G.M. Henry, Hugh Whistler, F.W. Champion, D. Dewar, Salim Ali, E.P. Gee, M. Krishnan and hundreds of others who filled the thousands of pages of journals like that of the Bombay Natural History Society (1886 onwards, now in its 93rd volume), were responsible for turning shikaris (and others) into ***naturalists*** who lobbied successfully for protected sanctuaries (like Hailey, later Ramganga, now Corbett National Park, estd 1936), game regulating organizations (like the Nilgiri Wildlife Association, estd 1877), natural history societies (like the B.N.H.S., estd 1883), and the Zoological, Botanical, Geological, Archaeological and cartographical Survey of India institutions, which then sustained interest and provided scientifically created databases that succeeded in arresting the destruction of wildlife (meaning forests too!), and a realization of the value of our sub-continent's unique natural resources, peculiar to this region.

Having had academic education and training in agricultural and veterinary sciences, including forestry, I have come to another disturbing conclusion that much clearing of virgin forest areas has been done for farming our agro-ecosystems, which account for the majority of our land area today. We now have sufficient arable land in every agro-climatic region within the country, and ***no more logging*** in natural forests (in protected areas and perhaps also in 'reserved forests') appears necessary. The timber we need must come from ***plantations***, like our

food is grown or reared on farms. It is time our people and the government realized that unless our undisturbed ecosystems (and also many partially disturbed ones that are not yet planted with exotic species like eucalyptus, coffee, rubber, cocoa, wattle, oil palm, etc.) are made *out of bounds* for everybody (except scientists and naturalists conducting research), disallowing entry to loggers and even 'mass' tourists, there is no hope for our wildlife.

Bird watchers and naturalists wanting to study and document the flora and fauna (scientists and academicians cannot do this alone), need to *be trained* by experienced seniors, and then given permission and wherewithal to conduct organized research, through sampling and survey of the wildernesses (inclusive of some so-called 'waste-lands'), all over our sub-continent. Once populations of wildlife species are allowed to grow (as they will) in protected reserves, they could then be encouraged to spread to expanded or restored habitats in the peripheral areas. Agro-ecosystems should also be improved *ecologically* by creating 'hedgerows' and windbreaks of useful shrub and tree species, which would increase soil fertility, reduce evapotranspiration and provide food and shelter for birds and beneficial insects, besides other animals and flowering herbs and grasses, thus promoting mixed ('natural') farming and improving or restoring the natural 'balance'. How bird watchers could help in studying and analysing the avifaunas of our natural as well as of the artificial ecosystems I will try to explain in future Letters. Hopefully, I have presented my 'case' well, readers? – Dr Kumar Ghorpadé

VULTURE NEWS

The Journal of the Vulture Study Group

VULTURE NEWS **is the only scientific journal devoted entirely to vultures. It aims to bring together the latest on research, conservation and all other matters concerning vultures on a world-wide basis. Since its inception in 1979, thirty-three issues have been published. As well as full-length articles, reports and news-worthy items, the journal provides regular reviews of recent literature and abstracts from conference proceedings.**

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VULTURE NEWS is published bi-annually (March & September) and the subscription price per annum is US $30 (worldwide). The subscription fee includes membership of the VSG, the regular newsletter *Gyps Snips*, and opportunity to participate in the VSG's conservation activities. Orders for current subscriptions and back issues should be sent to the VSG at P.O. Box 72334, Parkview 2122, South Africa.

Contributions to *VULTURE NEWS* are invited and should be sent to:

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PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 74 : June 1997

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 22-6-1997: Brahmananda Reddy National Park : Members are requested to meet at the main gate (adjacent to L.V. Prasad Eye Institute) at 7:30 a.m. This will be a half day trip.

EDITORIAL

INTEGRITY IN DATA COLLECTION

Persons working in the field of scientific studies and involved with data collection must have certain qualities if they are to really serve the cause they champion. It is important and also necessary to take a professional and honest approach to all work, both in the field and in the lab. Several ornithologists in the past, who brought honour to themselves and contributed immensely to our knowledge of birds, their habits and ecology, had one thing in common—a very methodical and meticulous approach to their work, a penchant for thoroughness, correct data collection and truthful recording and reporting. Never once did they deviate from the facts or let their imagination run around. Any report not based on facts does a great dis-service to science. Once such information is accepted on the authority of the person reporting it and based on the trust reposed in him by the scientific community, it will be well nigh impossible to remove this wrong information from the records.

The recent findings of the Expert Committee constituted by the British Museum of Natural History (B.M.N.H.), U.K., to verify the authenticity of Col. Richard Meinertzhagen's bird collection are startling, to say the least, to everyone working on the birds of the Oriental and African regions. These are the areas where the late British ornithologist had worked, and worked very accurately and diligently, (seemingly so now!), to acquire a most coveted collection of bird skins which he later donated to (or which was acquired by) the B.M.N.H. Late Col. R. Meinertzhagen was an extremely meticulous worker and a great ornithologist of his time, who earned laurels and appreciation from contemporaries like Hugh Whistler and Salim Ali.

Now, some things must first be clarified. Did all those who worked with him and with the specimens overlook the fact that they were doctored or improperly marked and identified ? What is the value of all such works now ! Secondly, why did this falsehood remain undetected all these years, since Meinertzhagen had worked in India, Afghanistan and their neighboring areas in the 1930s ? Be that as it may—the point here is not why it was not found all these years—the important fact is that this huge collection of nearly 35 years was found to be far from authentic (*see* 'Notes & News' p. 2). It is a very painful conclusion for any scientific group to arrive at and so also for those who are working on the birds of this region.

The B.M.N.H. has cautioned all ornithologists and others working on the birds of the Oriental region about the correctness of the Meinertzhagen Collection and has asked them to be extremely careful with whatever specimens and notes they would be using. Late Dr Salim Ali worked with the Colonel on several occasions and was on the receiving end of the choicest invectives and distorted opinions [Ali, S (1985): *The Fall of a Sparrow*. O.U.P. Delhi. p. 248]. Ali in return had only admiration for the man and his work. It is a pity that such a superb collection is unable to stand the test of time and scientific scrutiny !

In marked contrast, we have an incident, mentioned by Zafar Futehally [(1978): A portrait of Salim Ali. *In* A Bundle of Feathers (Ed. S.D. Ripley), pp. 1-8. O.U.P. Delhi.] about the late Dr Salim Ali, who refused to jump to conclusions when they (S.A. and Z.F.) came across some Longtailed Sibias with white foreheads, somewhere in Bhutan. S.A. was perplexed but refused to be coaxed by his nephew—who was excited by the discovery of a new avian species—to declare it as such. The next day a bird was shot and the mystery solved. The presence of pollen on the forehead of several birds, acquired during their feeding was the reason for the white colour. Had he made a rash statement and acted in haste, the records of ornithology would have had a wrongly entered bird. Such is the stuff of which great scientists are made !

Siraj A. Taher

NOTES & NEWS

A STATEMENT FROM THE COUNCIL OF THE BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

The Meinertzhagen Collection of Birds at The Natural History Museum, Bird Group, Tring, UK

In an article in *Ibis* in 1993 (135: 320-325), Dr Alan Knox suggested that the data associated with some of the 20,000 specimens donated to The Natural History Museum by **Col. Richard Meinertzhagen** were fraudulent. Based on visual analysis of the make-up of skins of redpolls (*Carduelis* spp.), he presented a strong, but not conclusive, case which attracted considerable media attention.

The BOU Council decided to investigate further, with a view to clarifying the status of the specimens and data and the scientific consequences. The first phase was to assemble a group of ornithologists and museum specialists which gathered opinion through wide consultation.

Whilst opinions varied, there was sufficient concern to merit further investigation. Thereafter, studies were undertaken, with the use of X-ray and chemical techniques, by Natural History Museum curator Dr Robert Prys-Jones (assisted by Dr P.A. Morris and colleagues at Royal Holloway College, University of London) on the redpolls examined by Knox. These studies, involving 70 specimens, overwhelmingly confirmed Knox's conclusions.

Dr Prys-Jones then carried the study considerably further. The Meinertzhagen Collection includes many skins from the Indian sub-continent, amongst which are a substantial number of unusual or unique distributional records. In association with Dr Pam Rasmussen from the Smithsonian Institution, a specialist in South Asian birds, a large proportion of these skins have now been examined. This work has involved collating information on plumage state in relation to the putative date of collection, on skin make-up style and on internal structure as revealed by X-rays and has included wide ranging comparisons with specimen material from many other collectors. In the course of this study, many thousands of skins have been examined and about 550 specimens of over 150 taxa have been X-rayed.

The results of these studies, which will be submitted for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals, demonstrate that numerous Meinertzhagen specimens have been labeled wrongly and that the data associated with them must often be incorrect.

As a result, the Council of the BOU and The Natural History Museum wish to emphasize the need for considerable caution in the use of specimens originating from the Meinertzhagen Collection. All such specimens in The Natural History Museum are clearly identified as being from the Meinertzhagen Collection: the curatorial staff at the Natural History Museum, Bird Group, can provide further advice on request.

[Contributed by Krys Kazmierczak (*Ibis* 139: 431)].

THIS FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 8

Philippines or Washington—home is the best !

Midway Islands (28^{0}N, 168^{0}W) in the Pacific Ocean are well known for a large well established colony of **Laysan Albatrosses *Diomedea immutabilis***. These birds are like giant gulls, weighing around 20 pounds and measuring about 4 feet from the tip of the tail to the tip of the bill.

Very often these huge birds posed a lot of problems during landing and take-off of aircraft, from this busy air base. It was, therefore, decided to rehabilitate these birds to distant places to prevent their return. In an experiment, 18 nesting laysan albatrosses were moved from Midway to the Philippine Islands, 4120 miles away; some were taken to the state of Washington, 3200 miles away from Midway: some covered 4120 miles in 32 days and others 3200 miles in just about 10 days, flying at an average speed of 317 miles per day! These records show that the albatrosses are not only "loyal to their native land", but also possess a highly developed sense of direction

References:

- Dorst, J (1963): *The Colourful World of Birds*. Paul Hamlyn, London.
- *Encyclopedia Americana*. 1976. vol. 1 & 18. New York.
- *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 1972. vol. 1 & 14. Chicago.

(Contributed by Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty).

There is an unconfirmed report (Kazmierczak *pers. comm.* to editor dt 29/4/97) of **Longbilled Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*** from **Bharatpur**, Rajasthan, earlier this year. It was identified by Paul Holt, an experienced bird tour leader in both India and America. Though it was photographed and videoed, we await the official write-up by the observer for confirmation. *If accepted, this would add a new species to the avifauna of the Indian subcontinent* !

The **Bombay Natural History Society** needs a hard-working, B.Sc. or M.Sc. (Biology) student, with a minimum 55% marks, for a project on the Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilos bitorquatus*, for one year—likely to be extended. The candidate should be willing to work alone, sometimes in really tough conditions in the night. Preference will be given to a local candidate,

with knowledge of Telugu. Applications should be sent to The Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Dr Salim Ali Chowk, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023.

The **Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh** has received a gift of slides on birds from members, Suhel Quader and Ramchander Pentukar. While thanking them whole-heartedly, we hope that their generosity is contagious and others will also donate slides, which will be used for educational purposes to further the cause of birds and their conservation.

Our member, Sachin Jaltare, whose line drawings in *Pitta and Mayura* have been widely acclaimed, has been selected to paint a greeting card for Bombay Natural History Society! We congratulate him and wish him excellence and success in his field.

Falcons belonging to the President of the UAE were released in Kyrgyzstan to gather scientific data on the birds that are highly valued in the Arabian peninsula. Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan-al-Nahyan ordered the release of 59 falcons used by him for hunting during the winter months in the framework of a major programme aimed at collecting data on migration of falcons into the wild. Four of the falcons were fitted with small satellite transmitters to track their movements over the next four or five months until the batteries run down. Falcons of Sheikh Zayed were released for the first time in 1995, when more than 100 birds were set free in Pakistan's western province of Baluchistan. [*Newstime* 2-6-1997].

A bird sanctuary, the biggest of its kind in the country, is being set up by the Gir Foundation, at Indroda National Park on the banks of Sabarmati river. The sanctuary, with an area of 6500 sqm. will be situated in the hilly area on the banks of the river. [*Newstime* 1-6-1997].

Crows haye become an endangered species in Lucknow, the city of *nawabs*. Their meat is believed to be a strong aphrodisiac and men have been eating crows to increase their potency. The local bird market has been selling crows at a premium. The bird trappers are charging extra for the crow on the grounds that it is a clever bird which is difficult to catch. As the population of crows has declined drastically in the city, the bird trappers have been scouring the neighbouring villages. [*Newstime* 1-5-1997].

John P. O'Neill and his team blazed a trail through the Peruvian jungle for 25 days and climbed more than 4,000 feet up a ridge east of the Andes. In the soggy cloud forest, they found a spectacularly coloured bird, previously unknown to ornithologists. O'Neill brought home the preserved specimens as models for the paintings to introduce the bird to the scientific world. The scientist (from the Louisiana State University) has so far discovered nearly a dozen other **new species** in his 35 years of study in Peru. This new, still un-named bird, has been identified as a *barbet*, related to the *toucan*. It has a scarlet crown, a red band on its throat and the breast and belly are gold and orange coloured. So far it has been found on only one mountain peak. The bird is an agile hopper and a short flier, about 50 feet at a time. [*National Geographic* April 1997].

Although very few captive **falcons** were bred until 20 years ago, falconers now breed almost all their hunting birds (even so, wildlife do-gooders continually accuse the breeders of stealing wild eggs and young birds). One result has been the creation of falcon hybrids—man-made birds that don't exist in the wild. A Peregrine crossed with an Asiatic Saker falcon is the favorite hybrid, but all sorts of exotic mixtures exist, including cocktails of 3 or 4 species. Falconers love the new hawks. But when they stray, they are proving an impossible puzzle for birdwatchers. [*Woman & Home* May 1997].

The true ancestor of birds may have been found in two **fossils** from the Jurassic age unearthed in China. They are almost as old as ***Archaeopteryx***—commonly held to be the earliest known bird, but accused of being an evolutionary dead end by some experts—and show signs of being stronger fliers. The primary contender to the title of father-of-all-birds is an as-yet unnamed species the size of a warbler.

According to the leader of the team that found the fossil, Lian-hai Hou of the Institute of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Palaeoanthropology in Beijing, the warbler-sized bird's strong flight ability is indicated by a well developed keel—a ridge on its breast bone where flight muscles were attached. *Archaeopteryx* and *Confucisornius sanctus*, found last year by Dr Hou's team, both lacked such keels and are believed to be incapable of anything more than short, clumsy hops of flights. If Dr Hou is correct in dismissing the 147 million-year-old *Archaeopteryx* as little more than a feathered dinosaur, the warbler-sized fossil may be the earliest known ancestor of modern birds. The second fossil lacks a noticeable keel but its tail vertebrae are fused into one bone called a pygostyle, allowing the tail to be used as a rudder during flight. [Robert Uhlig in *The Guardian* 11-1-1996.].

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column will be published every month depending on the data received from readers. We require notes on interesting and/or significant sightings and behaviour like nesting, breeding, feeding, etc. These will be printed in brief, telegraphic form. English names follow Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (1996, 12th ed.) and classification, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.).

ADILABAD DISTRICT

9-15/5 Jannaram Forest Division. (RM):
SHIKRA Displaying.
WHITE-EYED BUZZARD Assembly of 10+ birds around tank near Udhampur in Indanpalli range.
CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE Display and calls.
CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE Display and calls. At Islampur 1 bird suspected killed and eaten by a Leopard.
PAINTED SPURFOWL Skulking in bamboo forests.
GREY JUNGLEFOWL A cock displaying to 2 hens.
PEAFOWL Heard calling at a Tiger at Tallapet.
ROLLER A bird feeding young in hollow of tree.
INDIAN PITTA In pairs, not uncommon. Breeding?
BABBLER (sp?) Fully fledged chicks found dead at the foot of a Terminalia tree. Death due to heat?
SPOTTED GREY CREEPER 3 pairs in mixed bamboo and teak forest. (This is the 2nd confirmed record of this species from A.P. It was earlier reported by N. Majumdar from Kotapally, Adilabad dist. in 1978 - eds).

Dripping water from a leaking overhead tank in the range officer's quarters attract GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER, WHITE-EYE, SUNBIRDS, WHITEBROWED FANTAIL FLY-CATCHER, GREY TIT, REDVENTED BULBUL.

ANANTAPUR DISTRICT

PAINTED STORK 21/5 Veerapuram village. 2,000 breeding birds in January 1997, on various water tanks around the village, reported by N.R.K. Rao, C.F., Anantapur, (in *The Hindu* dt 22-5-1997).

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

DABCHICK 25/5 Hussain Sagar, Hyd. city: c. 500 birds near Sanjivayya Park (AP).
LARGE CORMORANT 25/5 Hussain Sagar, Hyd. city: 3 ad. & 1 imm. seen on rock near Sanjivayya Park (AP).
CATTLE EGRET 6/5 Hussain Sagar, Hyd. city: In breeding plumage. Seen scavenging fish scrap strewn behind Fisheries Dept. sales counter (SAT).
SHIKRA 1-10/5 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: Calling and displaying regularly (SAT).
PAINTED SNIPE 25/5 Sanjivayya Park, Hyd. city: A pair, F chasing M, flew into some reeds at margin of Hussain Sagar and the park (AP).
SPOTTED DOVE 1/5 Hyd. city: Building nest on rafter. 10/5 Incubating 1 whitish egg. Birds feed on grain on ground (AAA).
BLOSSOMHEADED PARAKEET 25/5 Sanjivayya Park, Hyd. city: A family with 4 yng with light grey heads, short tails and horny yellow upper and lower mandibles (AP).
PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 2/5 Osmania University campus: Heard (MSK).
PLAINTIVE CUCKOO 1-10/5 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: Heard in morn. and eve., often from a drumstick tree (SAT).
HOOPOE 25/5 Sanjivayya Park, Hyd. city: 1 bird feeding on ground (AP).
GREY HORNBILL 18/3 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: 2 birds on fruiting peepal trees, calling (AP).
GOLDEN ORIOLE 25/5 Sanjivayya Park, Hyd. city: 2 N under construction. One 10' above paved path, another, 30' high—in unidentified trees (AP).
BLACK DRONGO 25/5 Sanjivayya Park, Hyd. city: Extremely pugnacious towards other birds (AP).
HOUSE CROW 14-16/5 Hyd. city: Constructing nest in mango tree with twigs, silk cotton from broken pods strewn on ground, etc. On nest after 16/5 (AAA).
COMMOM IORA 25/5 Sanjivayya Park, Hyd. city: Males in breeding plumage, singing (AP).
REDVENTED BULBUL 18-19/5 Hyd. city: Carrying small twigs, etc., into a bougainvillea (AAA).

MEDAK DISTRICT

6/4 ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru: WHITENECKED STORK 2; BLACK IBIS 12; LESSER FLORICAN 1 imm.; SPOTTED REDSHANK 2, 1 in breeding plumage; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA 1; BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH 1 pair (AP).
28/5 ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru: LARGE CORMORANT 30+; LITTLE CORMORANT 100+; PURPLE HERON 2; PAINTED STORK 9; SPOONBILL 1; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 35+; SPOTBILL DUCK 45+; NAKTA 60+ males; GREY HORNBILL 2; PADDYFIELD PIPIT A pair carrying insects—breeding!; BAYA WEAVER BIRD 3 different nesting colonies, all bordering open wells; BLACK-THROATED WEAVER BIRD 30+ nests in one colony in reeds, 10+ nests in another, suspended from bushes; STREAKED WEAVER BIRD 1 nesting colony observed (SAT).

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

HOUSE CROW 18/5 Tondpalli village, Shamshabad mandal: c. 20 birds peacefully collecting pieces of binding wire for nesting material (AP).

CONTRIBUTORS: A.A. Aziz (AAA), A. Pittie (AP), M.S. Kulkarni (MSK), R. Mathew (RM), S.A. Taher (SAT).

Editor's Note: As Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé is away in the field, his column will be resumed from next month.

For Private Circulation Only

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Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher. **Membership** (Rs): Admission=10; Ordinary=35; Student=15 per annum; Life=500.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 75 : July 1997

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members should reach the destinations by themselves at 7.30 a.m. Both trips will be for a half-day. Please bring water, etc., as required.

13-7-1997: Hyderabad University, Gachi Bowli : Members are requested to meet at the main gate.

27-7-1997: Chilkur Deer Park : Members are requested to meet at the main gate.

NOTES & NEWS

THREAT TO WATERFOWL OF PEDDA TIPPA SAMUDRAM, CHITTOOR DISTRICT

S. Rangaswami
Hon. Chief Warden, Rishi Valley Bird Preserve

I wish to share with the readers of *Pitta* a shocking experience that Dr V Santharam (of Madras Naturalists' Society) and I had on 30 April 1997 when we had gone to **Pedda Tippa Samudram** (PTS) to observe the **waterfowl** population in it as well as in the small water bodies on the way. PTS is about 45 km from **Madanapalle** on the Kottakota-Mulakalcheruvu road. From Rishi Valley it is about 30 km. We approached the rear of the tank taking the mud road. We could see through our binoculars a large number of waterfowl nesting on a mound (which later turned out to be a brick kiln in disuse) surrounded by water, but not far from the water's edge. We could also see signs of nesting in the large number of *Acacia nilotica* trees some 200 m. away. We went by car as far as the mud road allowed and then got out and walked through dry fields some 100 m. or so in order to observe the birds closely.

Dr Santharam was surprised to see a few spoonbills and darters among the large congregation of waterfowl. He was equally surprised to see much breeding activity in the acacias at a distance. Even as we were observing the birds, I observed a gang of over 50 men, women, boys and girls cutting the Acacia trees at a furious pace and removing them from the area, the boys and girls carrying the logs away to PTS village. It was a well-planned effort. Some 10 to 15 men were cutting the trees, one every 20 minutes or so, the women pruned them and urchins carried them away. Just 50m. away breeding activity could be noticed. I rushed to the spot and appealed to them not to cut the trees. Finding that a lone voice of protest would serve no purpose, I rushed to PTS mandal with Dr Santharam, met Mr G K Rasool Bhasha, the MRO and after explaining what was going on urged him to accompany us to the spot in our car. He took us to Mr Abdul Ghani, the Sub-Inspector of Police (SI), gathered a couple of policemen in uniform in addition to his own staff. We were nearly 10 in all—more than the car could take! As we reached the spot the entire gang ran in all directions, dropping their implements. The policemen ran and caught a few of the culprits. The MRO acted promptly and took energetic steps to apprehend the culprits, recover the cutters from the houses and imposed penalties on the watchmen who were being paid to guard the area. He promised to take steps to stop any further cutting of trees. It is staggering to imagine what would have happened if we had not gone that day and took immediate action to save the habitat. In two or three days any numbers of the 1,000 odd trees would have been cut to the detriment of the waterfowl which were depending on them for roosting and breeding, even at this time of the year when their population is minimal.

We complimented the MRO and the SI for their spontaneous and immediate response and requested them to

THIS FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRDS - 9

Non-vegetarian Parrots !

Most parrots (Psittacidae) are colourful and generally bring to mind tropical forests. But the Kea *Nestor notabilis*, a parrot from southern New Zealand, inhabits alpine regions above the tree line. It is a large parrot (19") and has green feathers tinged with red and a strong long elongated, hooked bill. It has an orange rump and flashes yellow and orange in the wings in flight.

In summer it feeds on the ground and in trees, eating diverse plants, roots, berries and insects. It descends to lower levels in winter, scavenging around settlement dumps. It has acquired the obnoxious habit of pecking into the backs of living sheep for their kidney fat. To curb their sheep killing, a bounty was put on Keas, and paid on almost 30,000 during an 8-year period. This had little effect on their numbers, which apparently increased because of the plentiful food supply. Removing all sheep refuse after butchering was found a more effective way of controlling them.

References:

- Austin, O.L. (1983): *Birds of the World*. Optimum Books, Italy.
- Dorst, J (1963): *The Colourful World of Birds*. Paul Hamlyn, London.

(Contributed by Vinay Totawar & JVD Moorty).

ensure proper surveillance of the area. On 2 May I wrote to the DFO, Chittoor west, explaining the situation and requested immediate action to save the Acacias and the waterfowl and also arrange for planting of more Acacia saplings.

Now that I have seen for myself the waterfowl population of the area, I discussed with Dr Santharam the action to be taken for saving their precious wetland of appreciable size. We propose to involve the local residents in saving their ecosystem, to bring out a leaflet in Telugu highlighting valuable contribution the large numbers of waterfowl are making to the prosperity of the village and ensure that every house has a copy. We also intend arranging a meeting of the local people including teachers and students of the local school and make all of them sign a pledge to save the trees and the birds. Dr Santharam has agreed to make visits during winter to survey the waterfowl population at its peak.

While returning we spent some time to study waders near the small irrigation tanks. The influx of a large number of little cormorants in all the tanks right up to the tanks in Rishi Valley mouth, appeared a new development. We were also impressed by three pairs of grey herons which were breeding on the top of the canopy of a large tree in Gattu village.

We hope it is no idle dreaming on our part to think in terms of getting PTS declared as a waterfowl sanctuary or at least as a protected area with the enthusiastic support of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh.
[Letter received on 28 May 1997].

The first issue of ***Bird Link Newsletter*** (vol. 1 no 1, June 1997) has just arrived. Brought out by Bikram Grewal of **Bird Link Society**, it "hopes to provide a bridge between groups, individuals and even government departments to collect and share information of birds and bird habitats. All too often, we lose both species and habitats by default because a decision was taken without the full picture being made clear. We will collate and digest information from over 1,000 individuals and organizations from all over the Indian sub-continent in an attempt to provide a clear picture for the benefit of those interested in birds. This Newsletter is one small step in this direction. We intend also to use the Internet, e-mail, letters and petitions and even public meetings to champion the need to understand, protect and promote bird conservation and to defend the integrity of bird habitats." For more information about Bird Link, or to contribute news, information and views, write to Bird Link, 101/4 Kaushalya Park, Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110 016.

"Are **warblers** less important than tigers? ....

"Consider the fact that each leaf warbler (genus ***Phylloscopus***), on average, eats three insects every waking minute (this is averaging over all their activities throughout the day). Since they forage by picking prey off a substrata—mostly leaf, sometimes also twigs and flowers—their prey largely consists of herbivorous insects. In the case of my one hectare on Mundanthurai (Tamil Nadu), it is mostly leaf-eating caterpillars. A single leaf warbler thus eats an average of 180 insects every hour, or about 1,980 per day (assuming an average 11 hours working-day from dawn to dusk). The six individuals on our plot thus rid the plants of almost 12,000 insect pests every day!! Multiply that with the number of days (200 to 250) that they are in residence on that one hectare plot and you may begin to appreciate the service they render to all the plants. Now I ask you to consider removing these warblers from the study plot, since they seem to take away so much research and conservation energy from your more favoured mammals, and picture the forest as it may appear in a few weeks' time....! The scenario could become even more dramatic if you (in your large-mammal chauvinism) remove all the other insectivorous birds from the plot as well: I estimate each hectare of Mundanthurai's forest has at least 40 **insectivorous birds**, including other warblers and flycatchers (both resident and migrant), minivets, shrikes, drongos, babblers, etc. The average number of prey may come down to just over two per bird per minute—which gives a total of about 5,000 insects per hour, or 55,000 per day in every hectare of forest! Remove those insectivores: .... and don't be surprised if in a few weeks your plants start to appear ragged with their foliage tattered... and your endangered langurs become unhappy because so many leaves are now packed with toxic anti-herbivore compounds produced in response to caterpillar nibbling... and the plants make fewer flowers and fruits as they are forced to spend too much energy in self defense... in turn making the nectarivores and frugivores unhappy... and regeneration of the forest slows down as fewer seeds get produced and dispersed... and the ground starts to dry faster because the canopy is thinner and more sunlight gets in... I leave you to work out the rest of the ecological cascade effects on your own!! For now, I'd be happy if you simply pause to appreciate the job done by the nondescript little green jobs—the leaf warblers—and their insectivore colleagues that travel thousands of kilometers every year to eat all those insects.

"Are warblers less important than tigers? Isn't the question itself meaningless?"

[This is an excerpt from an essay by Madhusudan Katti (1997): Are warblers less important than tigers? pp. 108-109. In *In Danger: Habitats, Species and People*. Ed. Paola Manfredi. Local Colour, Hong Kong & Ranthambhore Foundation, New Delhi.]

One of the most important wildlife sanctuaries in India is threatened by illegal poaching, a state-government-sponsored leisure resort and prawn farming. The Chilika Lagoon, which opens into the Bay of Bengal, is home to hundreds of species of birds, including 95 migrants such as flamingos, barheaded geese, herons and pelicans. But Chilika Wildlife Division (CWD) director S K Patnaik now warns that "Chemicals used by prawn farmers are affecting the lake's aquafauna, and nearly 5,000 fishing boats—many running on diesel—are creating havoc near the core area." The Orissa High Court banned prawn farming in the lake in 1994, but the state government has yet to implement the court order.

The CWD has submitted a £ 5 million (approx. Rs. 3 crore) proposal for the protection of the wetlands, but Patnaik feels there is little chance of it receiving state clearance. Instead, he says that the authorities seem to be more interested in pushing through the development of a 1,417ha leisure resort at the mouth of the lake, to include luxury hotels, amusement parks and a golf course.

The project has met resistance from environmentalists, including the voluntary agency Parivartan, which claims

the state government is in breach of a regulation which forbids construction within 500m of the high-tide line. Officials and experts have called for the lagoon to be made a protected area, with fishing banned from a 5km area around the 17 sq km core—the wildlife sanctuary. Park authorities also want trees planted between the lake and the surrounding farms (villagers trap nearly 30,000 birds every year).

A spokesperson for Parivartan says: "If the state government does not evict the prawn farmers and scrap the resort project, we will move the Supreme Court of India for the implementation of the Orissa High Court's 1994 order and the Coastal Zone Notification."

Chilika Lagoon attracts the largest number of migratory birds outside of Lake Victoria in the US. More than 2 million migrants fly south each year to the lagoon's Nalabana Bird Sanctuary, which is protected under the Ramsar Convention. In 1994, CWD launched a habitat-improvement project in the sanctuary. The scheme resulted in more than 200,000 migratory birds (10% of the total) staying to breed rather than returning to Siberia, central Asia and Afghanistan.

Parivartan (1367, Mahanadi Vihar, Cuttack 753 004) has launched a fund-raising campaign to save the lagoon and the birds. Letters of concern should go to: The Chief Minister, Government of Orissa, Bhubaneshwar 753 001. [Pratap Patnaik in *BBC Wildlife* May 1997, p. 62].

The sighting of rare white crows in Orissa's Ganjam district has enthralled bird watchers and ornithologists. The white crow had appeared in this city some time ago. "I have personally seen this rare bird," said Mr Sudhakar Mohapatra, a senior forest officer and ornithologist. This was confirmed by the noted ornithologist, Dr Uday Narayan Dev who said that white crows were found in the Sheragada and Patrapur areas of the district some years ago. [*Deccan Chronicle* 30-6-1997].

Established in the midst of an up-market residential area, the Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park—known to almost everyone as Chiran Palace—is the center of many a varied opinion and argument. Should public have access to it as freely as they have to other 'municipal' parks of the city—for perambulation? Be that as it may, the 300-odd acres of dry deciduous and thorn scrub, encircled by a permanent wall, makes a wonderful bird sanctuary within the city! And this is where the Society's members spent a few good hours on 22-6-1997. What struck one immediately was the change in core-area and public-access area of the Park. The forest department has wisely realigned and restricted public movement (and so disturbance) to approximately a third of the park, all of this area being contiguous. The rest is demarcated as a core-area and human disturbance is not allowed. Well marked and laid-out paths are available for public use. This arrangement should be strengthened by allowing entry and exit to public only through the main gate. The rear gate should be used as a service gate by the forest department. 57 species of birds were seen by members and some of the more 'outstanding' are listed in "Birding Notes" on page 4. We thank Shri Manohar Rao and Shri Venkateshwara Rao of the forest department for their help and cooperation. (Aasheesh Pittie).

Dr B M Parasharya, Professor in Ornithology, Gujarat Agricultural University, Anand, was in Hyderabad and the Society took the opportunity to arrange his talk at C.I.E.F.L. auditorium, on Friday 27 June 1997. It was a fairly well attended function (thanks to members, Vinay Totawar and J V D Moorty). Dr Parasharya researched on the Indian Reef Heron and now works mostly in Kheda District of Gujarat. His illustrated talk on "Wetlands and wetland birds of Gujarat" was lucid, interesting and informative. After a brief introduction about the location and physical characteristics of Gujarat with special emphasis on the two Gulfs (Khambhatt or Cambay and Kachchh), he gave an insight into the richness, abundance and uniqueness of the state and the birds of the region. The many rivers, the tidal variations in the Gulfs and the irrigation canal systems have all contributed to high numbers of wetland birds—from storks and cranes down to waders. One of the most important sites is the Nalsarovar Lake where nearly 2 lakh water birds can be seen in winter. Nearby Porbandar is no less. The Rann of Kachchh and the Little Rann are the only known breeding grounds of flamingos in India; 80,000-100,000 birds have been estimated here during winter. Some of the other large concentrations of birds is 30,000+ demoiselle cranes and 10,000+ eastern common cranes, at various water bodies in Gujarat. Sarus cranes are found here and also breed, though in much smaller numbers. The huge concentration of cranes brings them in conflict with farmers as there is high crop raiding. Some interesting breeding birds of the Gujarat wetlands are glossy ibis (only known breeding place in India) in large numbers, purple heron, black ibis (common) and great crested grebe, which was supposedly a migrant but has been observed to breed at Khijadia. All the other 3 grebes, including the blacknecked are found in Gujarat. The other important birds seen in good numbers are the white, openbill, painted, whitenecked and blacknecked storks, though the blacknecked is restricted to the Kachchh area and breeds there. Increased agriculture has attracted large number of greylag geese and various ducks, including a good number of common shelducks, to the diverse wetlands of the state. Herons and egrets of all types are found in large numbers all over the state. Along the coast, terns and gulls are numerous but the blackbellied gull is an occasional sight. According to Dr Parasharya, the collared pratincole (nominate race) is also known to breed near perennial wetlands. Huge flocks of common swallows can be seen in several places. Agriculture has attracted blackthroated weavers and these can be seen in swarm proportions. Even the blackheaded munia seem to be increasing because of increased agriculture. Of the smaller birds, ruffs can be seen in lakhs, feeding on grain. Waders of diverse variety are seen along the seashore, mudflats and fringes of various other water bodies in inestimable numbers. The speaker also particularly mentioned great white and the dalmatian pelican seen in reasonable numbers though the spottedbilled pelican has never been reported from anywhere until now.

Talking of the effect of birds on the aquatic vegetation and vice-versa, Dr Parasharya mentioned 2-3 very significant points. The reddish *azola* sp. found in abundance in some lakes support large numbers of whistling teals, cotton teals and comb ducks. Shallow wetlands support a high concentration of coots which is essential as only when these birds clear several areas of the choking vege-

tation can the fishing activity start. But, commercial fishing in turn has affected the openbill and painted storks and the cormorants and pushed them to coastal areas. While *Ipomoea* sp. is a problem plant, the purple moorhen is destructive to the paddy and the large numbers of cormorants have an adverse effect on the commercial fishing activity. Speaking about pollution affecting the wetland, he was very firm in his opinion that most of the problems are related to increase in irrigation systems and agriculture, population growth and urbanization. "In some villages and areas, cattle are a big problem," Dr Parasharya said, "mainly for the ground nesting birds and especially when the water levels fall. Even though some trapping and killing does take place, it is not much prevalent in Gujarat." According to him, pollution has greatly affected the rivers flowing into the Gulfs of Khambhatt and Kachchh. Irresponsible government decisions are also creating problems. One bird sanctuary (Narayan Sarovar) was closed to accommodate a cement factory!

Speaking about the Asian Waterfowl Census conducted every year, Dr Parasharya said that only a few water bodies are counted and these alone give a figure of 3 lakhs and above. One district alone, will give a count of 80,000-100,000!

After a short question-answer session and a cup of tea, the meeting ended, leaving the audience refreshed and a little bit informed. (Siraj Taher).

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

For this column we require notes from Andhra Pradesh on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like nesting, breeding, feeding, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. These will be printed in brief, telegraphic form. English names follow Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (1996, 12th ed.), classification, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996).

WEATHER: 6/6 Pre-monsoon showers. 12/6 Regular monsoon showers (Weather Bureau). Generally pleasant weather with 30%-40% humidity and occasional strong windy gusts. But rains play truant, delayed.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

REDHEADED MERLIN 25/6 KBR National Park, Hyd. city: 1 bird in bare tree at 1815 hrs.

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 22/6 KBR National Park, Hyd. city: Good sightings of 2 birds (AP).

CROW-PHEASANT 16-17/6 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: Constructing nest c. 20' up a mango tree (AP).

SIRKEER CUCKOO 22/6 KBR National Park, Hyd. city: 1 bird.

SMALL GREEN BEE-EATER 22/6 KBR National Park, Hyd. city: Several juveniles without central pin-feathers and green heads *v.* coppery-gold in adult (SAT).

HOOPOE 22/6 KBR National Park, Hyd. city: 1 bird mobbing a male Shikra! Nesting? (AP).

BLACK DRONGO 22/6 KBR National Park, Hyd. city: Ad. feeding a juvenile atop a neem tree (SAT).

REDVENTED BULBUL 12/6 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: 2 young (SAT).

BROWNBREASTED FLYCATCHER?? 27/6 KBR National Park, Hyd. city: 1 bird with dark breast and white eye-ring (esp. behind eye) hawking insects in fresh-leafed teak trees, 1800 hrs (AP).

MAGPIE-ROBIN Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: 2/6 - 20/6 Nesting. Young being fed on branches between 20/6-23/6 (SAT).

MEDAK DISTRICT

21/6 ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru: COOT Amidst *c.* 1,000 coots on Patancheru Lake, a single *albino coot*! (Was seen 10 days ago by CTH). REDWATTLED LAPWING 1 nest with 3 eggs on rarely used road. Bird sitting close. Many such birds were seen all over the campus. LARGE INDIAN PRATINCOLE 2 families. 1 adult with 1 young; a pair with 3 young! First breeding record for A.P! PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 bird, silent. HOUSE CROW 1 yng bird on a palm. COMMON MYNA Carrying nesting material into hole in palm. STREAKED WEAVER, BAYA, BLACK-THROATED WEAVER all 3 species nesting in appropriate habitat. RUFOUSFRONTED WREN-WARBLER 1 bird in coarse grass. (AP, CTH, SAT).

CONTRIBUTORS: A. Pittie (AP), C. Tom Hash (CTH), S.A. Taher (SAT).

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Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher. **Membership** (Rs): Admission=10; Ordinary=35; Student=15 per annum; Life=500.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 76 : August 1997

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members should reach destinations by themselves at 7.30 a.m. The trip will be for a half-day. Please bring water, etc., as required.

17-8-1997: Indira Park, Lower Tank Bund Road : Members are requested to meet at the main gate.

NOTES & NEWS

Field Trip to Hyderabad Central University

J V D Moorty

About 12 km westward from Mehdipatnam lies the campus of the Hyderabad Central University (HCU), the venue for the field trip of BSAP on 13 July 1997. The BBC's weather forecast predicted a band of clear sky over Hyderabad, and so it was. On arrival within the campus at 7.30 am we were greeted by the raucous call of three Painted Partridges. Our stopping and trying to observe them excited the "security" personnel at the gate who had let us in without a murmur, but now insisted we meet their officer for 'official clearance,' as it was a Sunday. He, in the time honored traditions of senior officers, was in the bathroom, and so we spent a not so unpleasant 20 minutes watching Whitebacked Munias flitting in and out of the trees behind his office. We were whistled at by an Iora and an Ashy Prinia warbled its sympathy. Two Brahminy Mynas lent us austere support from atop an electric pole, whilst a Pariah Kite wheeling above, lorded over the proceedings. After a couple of phone calls to faceless voices, we were 'officially' allowed into the campus. By now the group had grown to 15. As we set off a Peafowl called from beside the road. Stopping for a quick *cuppa*, which we felt we badly needed, we saw an immature (?) Large Pied Wagtail hopping along with three Large Grey Babblers.

At the water-body behind the Indira Gandhi Library, Whitethroated Munias were busy constructing a nest. Since they were going about it in right earnest, we didn't want to disturb them by trying to observe their nest very closely, though there was an interest expressed to do so. Trampling through the grass we sent a hare scurrying for cover. For many it was just 'hare this moment, gone the next'!

The water-body had shrunk since I last saw it in the first week of March 1997. A Lesser Pied Kingfisher held our attention with its hover-aim-dive method of fishing. All six tries it made in 40 minutes were unsuccessful! On the opposite shore, in the overhanging branches of some *Acacia* bushes, were 3 White-breasted Kingfishers. Two male Bayas were hard at work on their nests. One of them had managed to complete a fair bit of his—we observed a pendulum-shaped structure with a hole in the middle. The other nest was in the beginning stages and was being attached to the branches of a bush. In the distance Median Egrets hunted in their quiet way. A Pond Heron was at its patient best. A lone Purple Heron winged its way languidly across the water to the far shore.

After a fairly leisurely breakfast we made our way to the second water-body on the eastern side of the campus. To get there, one slides down a huge boulder and walks with bowed head (to avoid numerous branches and other obstacles) through a 'jungle' to the water's edge. This was just a pathetic little pond—in the middle of the Southwest Monsoon! A Little Cormorant sunned itself on a rock and a couple of Little Egrets searched in vain for something to feed upon. We were treated to an impromptu solo performance by an Iora. An unidentified warbler was carrying some white cotton-like material in its beak—obviously lining for its nest. Our presence disturbed it.

As the day warmed, bird activity seemed to have dulled. A Plaintive Cuckoo bid us a mournful farewell as we left the campus at 11.30 am. For some newcomers it was a "rewarding experience", and they looked forward to the next trip. [Ed. Note: 49 species of birds were listed on this trip. Some significant sightings can be found under *Birding Notes* elsewhere in this issue.]

DDT contamination at the **Corbett National Park** in Uttar Pradesh has played havoc with the breeding among the **Lesser Fish-Eagle** pairs there, according

to the findings of a study conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society.

The population of *Ichthyophaga humilis*, a handsome eagle slightly larger than the city-dwelling pariah kite, is threatened as the DDT has contaminated water surfaces which are its hunting ground, the study noted.

Mr Rishad Naoroji, a BNHS researcher, monitored several eagle nests in the 1991-96 period as part of the study carried out under an Indo-US cooperative project funded by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and sponsored by the Indian Environment Ministry.

Mr Naoroji explained that the breeding among the lesser fish-eagle pairs had been affected mainly due to the thinning of egg shells which had led to breaking of eggs. "The young ones which did hatch died within a week," he stated.

Mr Naoroji said he had collected egg shell fragments from nests for analysis which had revealed contamination of egg shells by several organochlorine compounds. The eagle is fully dependent on the **Himalayan riverine system** for food and such contamination indicates threat to entire life forms including humans, he warned.

According to Mr Rishad, who is considered an expert on birds of prey, the contamination ratio provided vital clues to the pollution of local water bodies in and around Corbett National Park, which is one of the strongholds of the eagles. DDT constitutes 36 per cent of the contamination ratio besides other organochemicals. [*Deccan Chronicle* 5-7-1997]

The **Hygam wetland reserve**, 45 km north of **Srinagar**, has been completely destroyed. "In 1988, Hygam's wintering geese population was 40,000. Now only 200 to 500 geese frequent the reserve," said ornithologist Kuldeep Singh Jamwal. "Over 22 species regularly came to the valley in winter. Today, the winter tally of species has declined to 14." Exotic birds like curlews, cranes, barheaded geese and purple moorhens have completely stopped migrating to Kashmir, ornithologists say. The honking call of the barheaded goose remains only a memory for Kashmiris, who watch members of the species bypass their valley and fly to the remote Ladakh plateau. Hokersar, Kashmir's most famous wetland reserve, was once home to up to 150,000 birds in mid-November, when mists enshroud the snowy Pir Panjal mountain range nearby. According to a recent survey, the number of birds in this reserve has declined to 60,000. "We are losing our traditional heritage. We could not prove good hosts for these birds," said Rajiv Singh, a teacher and birdwatcher. The state Wildlife Department has taken steps to educate people living near sanctuaries and wetland reserves on the importance of saving the reserves, a department spokesman said. "There are chances of revival of these wetland reserves," the spokesman said. Some others say things may never be the same again. "I fear the honking and calling by greylags in unison may forever disappear in our valley," Jamwal said. [*BirdLink Newsletter* vol. 1 no 1, June 1997]

"The Brown Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus collybita* is perhaps the commonest and most widespread, with a distinct preference for babool and waterside shrubs, less so in dry hedgerows where it could be confused with the very similar Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*, barring the flicking of its wings. The Olivaceous Leaf Warbler *P. griseolus* has a very distinctive habit of operating on boles of trees and rock outcrops instead of among foliage and herein lies its identification character; Hinglogadh and situations like it are this warbler's preferred habitat where, though not common, it continues to be regular. The other **Gujarat *Phylloscopii*** are the Yellowbrowed Leaf Warbler *P. inornatus* easier to identify by its lisping '*tis yip, tis yip*' call, the Dull Green Leaf Warbler *P. trochiloides* with a high pitched '*chiwee*', the Large Crowned Leaf Warbler *P. occipitalis* which is usually overlooked, being silent and partial to taller trees, and the Tytler's Leaf Warbler *P. tytleri*, a bird I have yet to record to my satisfaction. Salim Ali records it as 'not uncommon' in the Dangs. I am sure other Leaf Warblers drop in, especially in better forested locations, but are largely overlooked for the reasons indicated earlier. A serious birdwatcher with an academic bent of mind may well produce a scholarly paper on habitat preferences of our wintering warblers, highlighting the need for qualitative afforestation instead of the present efforts." [Khacher, L. (1996): The birds of Gujarat - a Salim Ali centenary year overview. *JBNHS* 93(3): 331-373.]

Most predators pick off the old, the young and the weak members of a population. But a little hunter in Scandinavia called **Tengmalm's Owl** doesn't follow this familiar formula. These owls, called Boreal Owls in North America, kill voles and shrews that are a bit smaller than others of their kind but also fatter, says Vesa Koivunen of Finland's University of Turku. This may be because larger rodents take the best nesting sites and lose energy and fat defending them. Smaller ones wind up in meadows with plenty of food but no shelter from the owl's talons! [*National Geographic* April 1997]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST – 8

"…. but it is hoped that the natural history of bird life and the factors necessary for their survival will also receive attention and permit their preservation. The example set in the wetlands must also be extended to dry land and forests before it is too late." (Humayun Abdulali, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 82: 625-626; 1986)

"In recent years, migratory birds visiting south India have shifted their haunts considerably, and it could be that it is only comparatively recently that barheaded geese have taken to coming so far south." (M. Krishnan, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 84: 204; 1987)

"I think of the interest and unending enjoyment there is in the mere living of the jungle life and it is this, more than shikar, which forms the main attraction...." (R.G. Burton, *Tigers of the Raj*, 1987)

In my last seven Letters I tried to present an overview of our bird watching history and geography, cited some notable ornithological work done (as paradigms), and recommended conservation strategies for the future, as a background to my further writings on *specific* aspects of bird study that we need to pursue in our region. The ***study*** of Ornithology (I consider bird watching for pure personal pleasure from 'arm-chairs' or field stations on 'treks' a wholly selfish hobby which gives little or nothing in return to the birds we purportedly wish to 'conserve') is both a serious and a satisfyingly fulfilling outdoor (and indoor!) occupation, especially if one views bird watching as a *scientific* pursuit involving discovery and documentation of still unknown or little-known facts about the lives of the beautiful birds inhabiting or visiting our sub-continent.

From T.C. Jerdon's *Birds of India* (1862-1864) to the *Old Fauna* by Blanford & Oates (1889-1898), to the *New Fauna* by Stuart Baker (1922-1930) and finally in the *INDIAN HANDBOOK* by Salim Ali & Ripley (1968-1974), attempts have been made by these compilers to update taxonomic, biological, distributional and ecological information on our avifauna and make it available to users in a synoptic format. Actually, these voluminous summaries have been fashioned by reference to more than 10,000 different books, papers and short notes (published and unpublished) as well as to the hundreds of thousands of bird specimens collected, measured, skinned and labeled by hundreds of men and women who braved heat and ice, pestiferous insects, tropical diseases and what not, to discover, study and document facts about our bird life. These predecessors of ours have toiled over the past four centuries to enable us to possess the synoptic, beautifully illustrated and apparently simple-to-use field guides which tempt many present-day amateurs to believe that obtaining knowledge about our 1200+ species of birds and identifying them in the field, with or without field-glasses (binoculars), is a simple matter. Several of our bird watchers are also led to assume that in the *INDIAN HANDBOOK* we have almost everything important that is needed to be known about our avifauna, so we do not have to bother about further data and confine our birding to 'tick-hunting' and 'arm-chair pleasure'. Or maybe we think that such serious observation, analysis and documentation of facts and data about our bird life is best left to the ornithologists (professional scientists) who are *paid* to do these studies and research. Such pursuit of knowledge is anyway a full-time job, or so we believe!

My Letters are directed, very consciously, to the vast majority of people who 'watch' birds in this sub-continent, which once was Hindostan, with the hopeful objective of trying to convince them of the crying need for many of us not to waste time in just admiring these feathered beauties, but to jot down (or dictate into a recorder?) their observations for the use of scientists like myself, who could then analyse these reports and incorporate novel or confirmatory information into the database on our Avifauna. Sibley & Monroe's DNA-based classification (summarized for our area by Pittie & Robertson, 1993) has shown how even our understanding of evolutionary relationships (phylogeny) and basic systematics of birds is nowhere near complete or accurate. But what we badly need from the bird watching 'community' nowadays is some comprehensive work on the biology (especially breeding or nidification) and ecology (particularly food and preferred habitats) of our bird species. Even more than the faunistics of the birds of a District (which I still consider important for each serious bird watcher to compile), work on the *bird associations* in particular habitats (jungle, cultivation, wetland, *etc.*) like that done by M.D. Lister (see my Letter No. 3, *Pitta* January 1997) is urgently required. Those of you interested in pursuing this may want to read Lister's "Birds and Ecology" in the *J.B.N.H.S.* (50: 147-156; 1951) where he very simply outlines the ways to go about such studies. For those of you interested in documenting the bird fauna of your District (with annotations on their bio-ecology), there is nothing simpler than the 'advice' given by Hugh Whistler to Salim Ali (see *The Fall of a Sparrow*, Appendix 1, pp. 234-239; 1985). A.O. Hume's report on the birds of Sind (*Stray Feathers*, 1: 44-89, 91-289; 1872-1873) is an excellent model to use, as are the papers by Salim Ali (with notes by Hugh Whistler) on the bird faunistics of several erstwhile Princely States, published in the *J.B.N.H.S.*

Embarrassingly little is really understood about the role of birds in agriculture, horticulture or plantations in India even today. Sweeping generalizations exist, about which bird species are thought to be 'pests' and of the 'importance' of others that are beneficial to our economy. Plant and insect species dominate the food preferences of a majority of bird species but little authentic or detailed (species level) study has been carried out in our area. Breeding biologies and nesting habitats are rarely subjects of interest to most bird watchers of these times here, even though a large percentage of our avifauna has scarcely been investigated for this purpose. One can go on and on but my intention is only to make readers realize how much they can contribute to knowledge if only they kept regular notes and tried to learn the finer nuances of their pleasurable hobby.

Members of the B.S.A.P., I venture to suggest, should concentrate on studying the birds of the Deccan Plateau (28 Districts—as of 1961), and the Rayalseema (4 Districts) and Andhra Carnatic (4 Districts) zones of the Eastern Ghats—Carnatic sub-region, and perhaps as well the three Districts of the Northern Circars (see my Letter No. 2, *Pitta*

November & December 1996 and No. 5, *Pitta* March 1997). It is these 39 Districts that this Society could adopt as top priority areas for documentation of bird data, which could be held in a computer at one Editor's home in Hyderabad. The three quotations that began this Letter may provide hints to the kind of studies that members could undertake, but the important thing is that such reports, when ready, must be regularly read out by them at monthly meetings of the B.S.A.P. I am convinced that such a plan of action, if approved and seconded by a majority of the membership, would result in a wonderful revival of interest in members and provide a creditable example of group activity to bird watchers and their clubs or societies in other States of the Indian Union.

— Dr Kumar Ghorpadé

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes notes from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. These will be printed in brief, telegraphic form. English names follow Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (1996, 12th ed.); classification, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996).

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

STONE CURLEW 4/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: 1 N with 2 eggs, under hedge. 6/7 N abandoned when nearby tree was blown over in storm. (CTH).

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 27/6-7/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: Seen and heard often. (SAT).

CROW PHEASANT 1-10/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: Heard often (SAT).

SPOTTED OWLET 21-22/7 Gunrock Enclave, Secunderabad: A pair nesting in a tamarind tree. (SAT).

NIGHTJARS (sp. ?) 2-3/7 KBR National Park, Hyd. city: Sitting on trails at 0430-0515 hours. (SAT).

BLACK DRONGO 20/7 Jubilee Hills, Hyd. city: A pair N in *Terminalia* sp., vigorously defending N from marauding house crows. (CTH).

TREE PIE 1-10/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: Seen and heard often. (SAT).

PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD 11/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city: A nest hanging from Bougainvillea bush. Pair in attendance. (SAT).

BAYA WEAVER BIRD 20/7 Jubilee Hills, Hyd. city: Nest over a well. (CTH).

FLOWERING PLANTS: Rusty Shield-bearer, Tamarind, Jacaranda, Lantana (SAT); Teak, Laburnum, (AP).

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru:

REDHEADED MERLIN 16/7 Stooped at a Green Sandpiper, but was thwarted by a pair of Redwattled Lapwings. (SQ).

INDIAN BLUEBREASTED BANDED RAIL 23/7 1 bird in rice paddies. (SQ).

BROWN CRAKE 16/7 1 in rice paddies. (SQ).

GREENSHANK 16/7 2 birds in rice paddies. (SQ).

GREEN SANDPIPER 16/7 15-20 in rice paddies. (SQ).

RED TURTLE DOVE 16/7 In song. (SQ).

HOUSE CROW 21/6 A congress of crows feeding on remains of a Grey Heron chick which must have fallen out of a nest in the Palmyra palms. (SAT).

WHITEBROWED BULBUL 16/7 In chattering song. (SQ).

RED MUNIA 16/7 Flock of 80 birds. M in intermediate, mottled red, plumage. (SQ).

NALGONDA DISTRICT

DINDI RESERVOIR 5/7: OPENBILL STORK *c.* 100; GREAT-ER FLAMINGO *c.* 300; TERNS (sp.?); PIED KINGFISHER. (CTH).

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

PURPLE HERON 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ.: 1 bird. (JVDM).

WHITEBACKED VULTURE 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

SHORT-TOED EAGLE 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

PAINTED PARTRIDGE 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

GREY PARTRIDGE 27/7 Chilkur Deer Park. (SAT).

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 27/7 Chilkur Deer Park. A pair. (SAT).

COMMON HAWK CUCKOO 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

GOLDEN ORIOLE 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

HOUSE CROW 20/7 Tondpalli Village, Shamshabad Mandal: 1 imm., bird on ground. (AP).

YELLOWEYED BABBLER 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

JUNGLE BABBLER 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

BOOTED WARBLER 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ.: *Unconfirmed*. (JVDM).

BAYA WEAVER BIRD 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ.: Nesting. (JVDM).

WHITETHROATED MUNIA 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ.: Nesting. (JVDM).

FRUITING PLANTS: 27/7 Chilkur Deer Park: *Zizyphus xylopyra*, *Randia dumetorum*.

ABBREVIATIONS: Hyd.=Hyderabad; imm.=immature; KBR=Kasu Brahmananda Reddy; M=male; Univ.= University.

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PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 77 : September 1997

9/9/97

PROGRAMME Ind: 15/2/2001

FIELD OUTING: Members should reach destination by themselves at 8.00 a.m. The trip will be for a full day. Please bring lunch, water, etc., as required.

21-9-1997: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad : Members are requested to meet at bus stand at Anantgiri.

EDITORIAL : LETS MAKE GOOD USE OF OUR BIRDING LISTS !

"The pleasure that is derived by most of us from watching birds, is a good enough reason to indulge our hobby. However, our jottings on field trips, in the form of Lists, keep accumulating over the years and are generally not used in any further analysis or study. How many among us use our data to write up papers for scientific publications—like *ornithologists*? How many of us have data beyond a quickly scribbled "Redvented Bulbul - nesting!?" Such notes will never be sufficient for a robust scientific paper. Yet we enjoy birding and keep notes of our observations. Our joy of birdwatching could be extended if we contributed our abbreviated or telegraphic notes to an organization for compilation and analysis. If these data which are collected by *amateur* ornithologists or birdwatchers throughout India were to be compiled regularly in a format which is both concise and clear, they will, over a period of time, result in a lot of useful information which will be available for further analysis.

Birding Notes is a monthly column in this bulletin, *Pitta*, which contains this type of data from Andhra Pradesh. Members' notes are printed in a *telegraphic* format, retaining only important and outstanding aspects of their observations. Eligible notes include: breeding records, uncommon sightings and behaviour, migratory birds' arrival and departure dates, local migration, heronries, roosts, etc. Information is printed in a format of ***State / District / Site / Species***. State and District are arranged alphabetically, Species systematically under each District with Sites following Species. Abbreviations used in the text are appended at the end. Contributor's initials appear at the end of each published record and a footnote to the column contains the full credits.

Initially, notes will be published from the 4 southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Depending upon the over-all response, the scope of this project will be further extended to cover all the other Indian states. Participants will have to send the following information for each observation.

1. State, District, Site, Coordinates (if possible) from where observation is reported.
2. Date of observation or period e.g. 1-10/7/1997.
3. English and scientific name of bird species and other pertinent species (plants, insects, etc.) mentioned.
4. Qualifying statements for observations such as 'breeding,' etc., like "Nest (N) was seen,"; "Bird carrying fecal-sac/food/nesting material in bill,"; "Birds seen copulating/ singing/displaying," etc.
5. Any related phenomena pertinent to the observation e.g. flowering/fruiting of trees and shrubs, sudden filling-up of waterbodies, etc.
6. Name, address, phone numbers, etc., of observer.
7. A type-written/computer printout is preferable. Otherwise a neat and legible note is requested.

What could be the advantages and outcome of such an exercise? At the outset, let us realize that though a lot of bird study has been done in India, we still do not have enough basic information about the varied tapestry of our bird life. All effort will be made to scrutinize each and every record before publication with the assistance of honorary referees from each state and of course, the active cooperation of the observer. As mentioned earlier, this project will squeeze a great deal of information into its concise format. Information regarding distribution of birds, their breeding periods, their migratory habits, their feeding habits, etc., which information is still quite incomplete for India, will begin to accumulate every month. As this data will be computerized, various types of studies and interpretations can be made with ease. This data can be made available to researchers as and when they require it for a nominal charge. An annual publication could be brought out with analysis of the past year's data as a reference book along with addresses of the participants and other interesting and related information.

It should be noted that while information sent to us for this column will be certainly published if found appropriate, contributors will receive a free copy, only of the first *Pitta* containing their notes. Thereafter, even though they send notes (which are published), they will have to become a member of the BSAP to receive further copies of *Pitta*. Only ***members*** of the BSAP will receive free copies of *Pitta*. Members of this Society receive the following publications in a year - 2

issues of *Mayura* (newsletter) and 12 issues of *Pitta* (bulletin). For membership details please write to the address at the end of this Bulletin.

Readers of *Pitta* are familiar with the *Birding Notes* column, which has been appearing since a few months. If you have any doubts / clarifications or suggestions, please feel free to write to me. But do send in your observations promptly and regularly, every month and, make this effort a success!"

The above note was sent to a few prominent ornithologists and birdwatchers of India, requesting them to send us their views on the soundness of this project. Their response is given below. —Aasheesh Pittie

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"Your circular letter of 23 July (1997) contains an excellent suggestion about telegraphic bird notes. I agree with everything that you say. It will become a valuable data base, it will encourage people to send in brief notes regarding sightings which they would not normally have done, and it may also *restrain* persons from writing worthless accounts, when all that was needed was to mention the species and the place. Altogether a very worthwhile project. I will write a note in the July/August *NLBW*."

Zafar Futehally
Editor, *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, Bangalore

"It is a good idea to publish 'telegraphic' information on bird sightings in India. We have the following comments:

1. Please verify every record. Otherwise you will get Rufousbellied Hawk-Eagle in Jodhpur or River Chat in Tamil Nadu! .... You can send extra-ordinary records to Bird Record Committee.
2. Initially restrict to A.P. only, then slowly expand to south India and finally to whole India.
3. Do not publish trivial records e.g. 'Hoopoe. 1 bird feeding on ground.' Where do you expect it to feed? Records like '*c.* 500 Dabchicks near Sanjivayya Park on 25 May' or 'more than 10 White-eyed Buzzards' are important. Publish such records only.
4. We will be happy to give wide publicity to your proposal in *Hornbill* and Hon. Secretary's letter to BNHS members. Can you send a small write up for *Hornbill*?"

Dr. Asad R. Rahmani
Director, Bombay Natural History Society
Mumbai

"Many thanks for your letter of the 23rd instant. I note that Rahmani has already written to you in detail. I agree with his various suggestions. We will assist you as much as we can."

J. C. Daniel
Honorary Secretary, Bombay Natural History Society
Mumbai

"I think you have an excellent idea which I hope you will be able to implement with the co-operation of birdwatchers. In fact when I saw the column in *Pitta* I wondered if we could do a similar one in our *Blackbuck*. Now that you are taking the initiative to publish such notes for all of Southern India, we shall only be to glad to support you. My only apprehension is that we have amongst us several people who are too lazy to put pen to paper and we should be able to sufficiently motivate them to co-operate. This could be the beginning of a movement to scrutinize the 'new records' and rare birds that get reported from time to time. We may need to appoint local co-ordinators who could screen the records before they are sent to your publication."

Dr. V. Santharam
Honorary Secretary, Madras Naturalists' Society
Chennai

"Aasheesh Pittie's BIRDING NOTES, now appearing in *Pitta*, specify the States of 'Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu' that will be covered by him, but I believe that there should be no place for such *political* subdivisions in Science, which Ornithology most certainly is. I would like the B.S.A.P. to use the recognized *biogeographical* subregions which I listed in my Letter # 2 (*Pitta* November & December 1996), and target *the whole of peninsular India* south of the Rivers Tapti—Purna—Bembla—Wardha—Pranhita—Godavari. If this is done, then besides the four States specified above, most of Maharashtra, a little of Gujarat, all of Goa, Daman, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Pondicherry (including Karaikal, Yanam & Mahé also) will also have to be covered. As I pointed out in the earlier Letter, peninsular India is a biogeographically distinct subregion of the Oriental Region, with three discrete zones: (1) The Western Ghats, a biodiversity hot-spot, dominated by the monsoons which nourish a lush, species-rich vegetation sustaining thousands of animal species (24 Districts—as of 1961); (2) The Eastern Ghats—Carnatic Plain, governed mainly by the North-east Monsoon, ancient geological formations and drier tracts leeward of the Western Ghats (25 Distt); and (3) The Deccan Plateau, created by intense volcanic activity 70-50 million years ago a little before the Indian Plate collided with Eurasia to push up the Himalayas, and erratically regulated by the South-west Monsoon rainfall that replenishes the water table below the black cotton soil (28 Distt). These 77 Districts are what need to be .....*continued on page 4*

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST – 9

" In India the earliest European town is Fort Cochin .... it is the cradle of Christianity in India .... literacy .... in Fort Cochin is cent per cent .... this town is the most thickly populated in India, and one of the most crowded in the world.

" On the east of the Parade Maidan there is a house with a Dutch emblem at the gate, 'Voc 1740'. The house originally built by the Portuguese, was occupied by the Dutch East India Company Officers for 133 years. During the British period it was occupied by Rev. Samuel Ridsdale who converted a prince of the Cochin Raja's family .... The house is a monument of historical importance .... now bought and remodelled by M/s. Matheson Bosanquet.

" .... the house north of it was the residence of Portuguese Governors; Vasco da Gama lived here in 1524, and died the same year." (K.L. Bernard, *History of Fort Cochin*, 2nd edn, 1995: 73-74)

Now that we have celebrated a half century of our independence, perhaps we can look towards the next fifty years with greater hope, cheer and confidence. In this Letter, I attempt to delve into history and use the bird watching time I spent recently on a holiday in Cochin to highlight urban bird associations and natural history in Kerala.

Incidentally, the 50 years that we have seen through as free Indians ("free as a bird"!) pale into insignificance when we view our unique *civilization* (not Empire, not Raj, not Republic) with a historical perspective that goes back 3,000 years, at the least. As a naturalist and freelance scientist, I believe we should also reminisce and eulogize the 500 years since the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope in 1497 and established a settlement at Calicut (Kozhikode) in 1498. Vasco da Gama died in Fort Cochin on Christmas Day in December 1524 and is buried there. The European entry into India brought in scientific technique and technology when "palm leaves were replaced by paper, quills and ink" and printing was introduced to facilitate learning and documentation of knowledge for posterity. Garcia da Orta's "*Coloquios...*" (1563) on Indian medicinal plants was one of the very first books printed, in Goa. After this, a Spanish Jesuit, J. Gonzales, printed a book in Cochin in 1577. After the natural harbour at Cochin "was born" in June 1341, this town has seen many nations come for trade and their citizens visit it. From Arabs to Buddhist Chinese ("Co-chin" was perhaps named by them, after their native place in Cochin China or 'nasalising' *Kochchi*, the local Malayali name for this small place!?) to the Portuguese who ruled Cochin from 1500-1663, the Dutch who ruled from 1663-1795, and the British from 1795-1947, this seaport has had much cultural interaction over the past 6-7 centuries, and was the place from where "Christianity seeped into India" (*vide* Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 1996).

After da Garcia's *Coloquios*, a Dutch Governor of Cochin, H. van Rheede, took 17 years to complete a masterly 12-volume pre-Linnaean flora titled *Hortus Malabaricus* (1686-1702), including 744 folio plates, printed in Amsterdam (Holland). He was helped by a Carmelite priest Fr Mathews and four local Ayurvedic physicians, Ranga Bhatt, Vinayak Pandit, Appu Bhatt (Konkanis from Cochin) and Itty Achuthan (from Shertallai). Collaborative work like this done over three centuries ago is still desperately needed here. Our botanists are even now attempting to give correct scientific names to the many plants described and illustrated in this Materia-Medica of Malabar.

At Fort Cochin I visited my cousin brother, an employee of Matheson-Bosanquet Enterprises Ltd, staying at the historic house built $2^1/_2$ centuries ago alluded to in the above quotation. Called "2 Stuber Hall" on Ridsdale Road, this was my residence from 24-29 June, earlier this year. It was monsoon time and more than 20 cm of rain fell during these six days, when maximum temperatures ranged from 27-33^{0}C and minimum from 23-27^{0}C. My bird watching had to be confined mostly to the ample garden area that the wooden gate with the "Voc 1740" Dutch emblem opened to. The overgrown garden enclosed by high whitewashed walls draped in part by flowering climbers was turfed with partly mown lawn grass. Flower beds and pots grew flowering and foliage plants of some variety. An avocado tree occupied one corner and a much older, tall unidentified tree towered over the wall opposite. The ubiquitous coconut trees were amply evident. In the few hours that we were spared of rainfall, I tried to observe the bird association inhabiting this urban micro-niche. A couple of pairs of the Oriental Magpie-Robin (*SYNOPSIS* Number 1661) dominated the gardens of this and the adjacent house which had a large mango tree as well. They woke me up each morning with their melodious calls and were continuously indicating their presence. Other birds seen in the garden were a Red-vented Bulbul (1118) and Purple-rumped Sunbirds (1907) which frequented the flowering plants and sounded their metallic calls. Indian Mynas (1006) hunted for grasshoppers on the lawns and sought shelter on window sills of the house when a sharp shower descended on them. House Sparrows (1938) also picked up grain or grass seeds and insects from the ground, chirping away in unison. A Jungle Crow (1955) once showed up on the wall, cawing away. Birds heard calling, though not seen, were Red-wattled Lapwing (366), Oriental Koel (590), Large Coucal (600), White-breasted Kingfisher (735), Crimson-breasted Barbet (792), Black-backed Woodpecker (858) and White-bellied Tailor (1535). On car drives into Cochin town past the harbor and Willingdon Island, some other birds were seen like Indian Pond Herons (42) stalking paddyfields, Pariah Kites (132) soaring in the air or rummaging in garbage dumps, Blue Rock Pigeons (516) in large numbers as also House Crows (1048) and Rose-ringed Parakeets (549). Black Drongos (962) were rarely seen perched on electric wires and a large flock of Black-crowned Night Herons (52) was seen flying over the Cochin Harbour at dusk one evening.

House Crows were ubiquitous, abundant and scavenging in gay abandon all over town, advertising their presence with their raucous calls. This bird is dominating the urban scene in India, along with the parasitic Oriental Koel and the Pariah Kite. They are the 'rats' of the bird world, indicators of the filth and garbage produced in each urban habitat. Once we all wondered why there were "no crows in Kodaikanal"—simply because there was no "free food" or human waste available in that hill station. Now they are present and indicate the urbanization and garbage availability in Kodai. The more the crows, the dirtier a town is.

Salim Ali's *BIRDS OF KERALA* (1969) is the basic reference for this State and on pp. 11-12 he listed the major earlier workers in this area—T.F. & F.W. Bourdillon, H.S. Ferguson and J. Stewart. Ali & Ripley (*INDIAN HANDBOOK*, 10: 272; 1974) name some others who wrote on Kerala's birds—W. Davison, A.O. Hume, M.C.A. Jackson, A.P. Kinloch, K.K. Neelakantan, A.M. Primrose and C.R. Stonor. T.F. Bourdillon also wrote *Forest Trees of Travancore* in 1908 and H.S. Ferguson published "A List of the Butterflies of Travancore" (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 6: 432-448) in 1891. T.S. Nayar (1995, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 92: 212-219) recently published "A concise review of forest flora of Kerala".

To reassert then, this "India" is a *civilization* of thousands of years, not just an 'infant' independent nation five decades old last month. The American novelist Mark Twain travelled in India and visited Cochin in 1896 (the year Salim Ali was born in Bombay) and this is what he wrote of our land—"This is indeed India, the land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendour and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants, of Aladdin's lamps, of tigers and elephants, of cobras and the jungle, the country of a hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and a million gods, cradle of the human race, birth place of human speech, mother of history, grand-mother of legends, great grand-mother of tradition, the one sole country under the sun endowed with imperishable interest for alien prince and alien peasant, for the lettered and the ignorant, wise and fool, rich and poor, bound and free, the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once even by a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the world combined."

— Dr Kumar Ghorpadé

..... *continued from page 2*

targeted and covered by B.S.A.P., if not other Nature Societies in peninsular India as well. Other suggestions:

1. Use English names of bird species in capitals with Synopsis Number in brackets.
2. Dates to be given like 4.vii.97 and not just 4/7.
3. Use District (1961 ones?) subheadings for district avifauna data.
4. But use Ecosystems subheadings otherwise (check Champion & Seth or Gadgil & Meher-Homji's Forest/ Vegetation Types, or Lister/ Gerald Durrell habitats e.g., Built-up areas (town/ village), Jungle (evergreen/deciduous/ conifer/thorn/sholah/scrub) Desert (semi-arid/ arid), Tundra, Cultivation (farm/ orchard/ plantation/fallow land/wasteland), Wetland (lake/irrigation tank/ nullah/river/dam/marsh/ seacoast/cliffs & dunes/ inland waters/ backwaters/smooth shores/rocky shores/seas & oceans), Mountain / Meadow / Grassland, etc.
5. Also use these subject headings: Nidification, Food, Populations, Calls & Songs, Behaviour, Associations, Migration, Distribution, Local movements, etc.
6. Better to use full names of authors, not initials.
7. I will publicize BRIEF BIRD NOTES (better than BIRDING NOTES) in my HUMEA and *Indian Journal of Biodiversity*.

Better you target 'professed ornithologists' rather than the 'bird fanciers' you are planning to contact."

Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé, Bangalore

"The project for gathering base line data on Indian birds is great but, consider the size of the country and the paucity of birdwatchers. Even Andhra is huge and with varied habitats. I would not like to see your enthusiasm burn out. But, the concept is great provided people will respond. You might give this a thought."

Lavkumar Khacher, Gandhinagar

"Congratulations on the very informative and well-brought out *Pitta* (No 76 - August 1997). This Newsletter is surely getting better and better with every issue. Much as I would have liked to, I was unable to join the field trip to the Hyderabad Central University in July. However, the article on this field trip by Mr. J. V.D. Moorty is so vivid and well-written that I was tempted to read it over and over again at the end of which I felt as if I was actually with all of you during that trip and that I never missed it. The Birding Notes are also not only quite exhaustive but adds a certain amount of credibility by including details such as date/s, locations and the names of the contributors."

Walter Sanjeeva Rao, Hyderabad

The *Garrulax* Corner

In reply to a question whether the Great Indian Bustard was found at a wildlife sanctuary created for Blackbuck in Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra, I was informed in all seriousness, "I don't know if the Red Indian Mustard is found there" !!

For Private Circulation Only

For more information write to: Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh, P.O. Box 45, Banjara Hills Post Office, Hyderabad 500 034.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher. **Membership** (Rs): Admission=10; Ordinary=35; Student=15 per annum; Life=500.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh **No. 78 : October 1997**

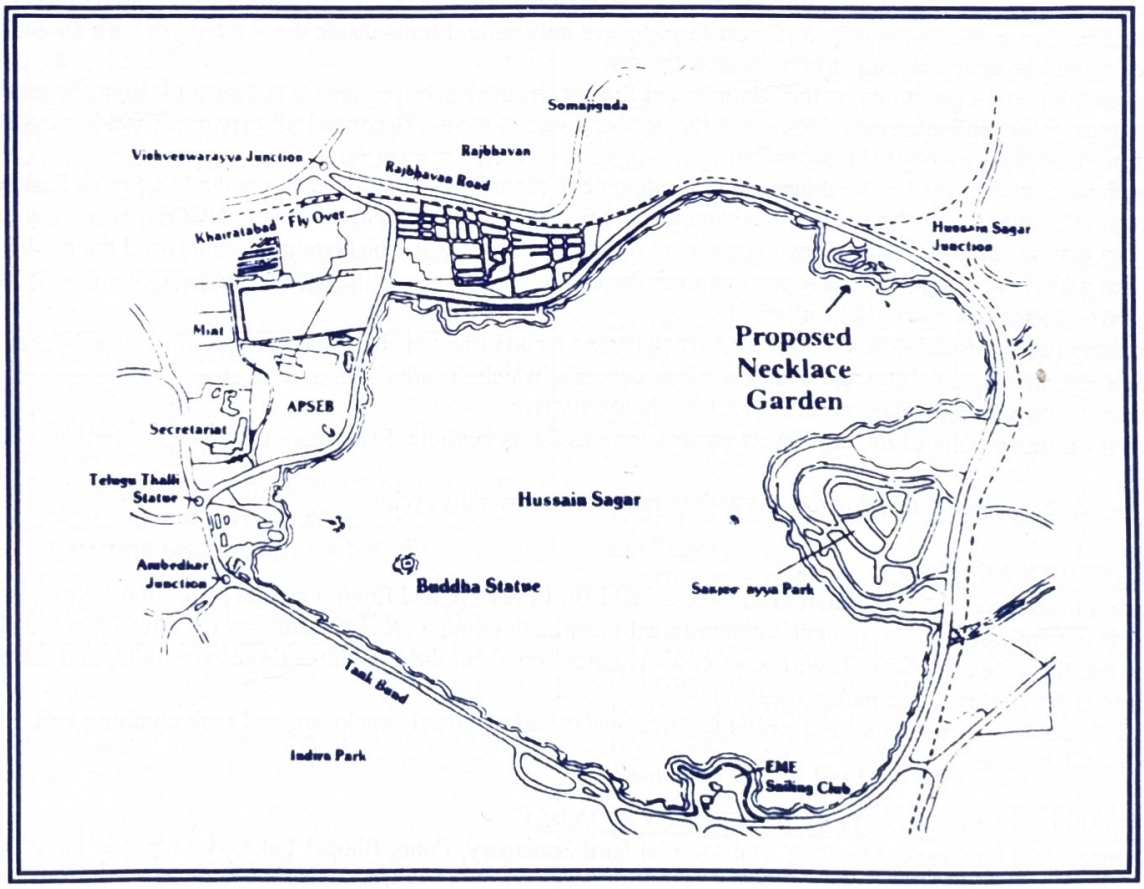
PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members should reach destination by themselves at 8.00 a.m. The trip will be for a full day. Please bring lunch, water, etc., as required.

19-10-1997: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad : Members are requested to meet at bus stand at Anantgiri.

EDITORIAL : LETS SAVE THIS AREA FOR WILD BIRDS !

Through an advertisement in the local papers (*Andhra Pradesh Times* dt 9-9-97; *vide* CTN No. HUDA/DEV/GLU/14/97-98 Dt 30-88-1997), the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority (HUDA) has invited plans to develop an area of approximately 14 acres abutting the Hussain Sagar, into a "beautiful garden" (see map). They also plan a Jetty to link with Lumbini Park, for boating. Members will recall that the BSAP has been birding here for many years and have listed various migrant waterfowl and other birds. The large number of Shovellers *Anas clypeata* and Pintail *A. acuta* is worth noting (see Editorial: *Pitta* # 72, April 1997). Such concentrations of birds in the center of a congested metropolis is a rare phenomenon deserving preservation and advocacy. The BSAP has initiated a joint effort of local environmental NGOs in submitting an alternate proposal to the Vice-Chairman, HUDA, the text of which is given below. Members are requested to assist in saving this wonderful area.



MEMORANDUM FROM NATURE LOVERS AND NGOs OF HYDERABAD

"This **unique** area, abutting a large body of open water (Hussain Sagar), in the **center** of the city, is **rich** in micro flora and fauna. It has **many physical features** which are remnants of a fast disappearing *Hyderabadi* landscape like rock formations, groves of trees, wide gradually sloping banks of the lake, etc. It is the last of the wilderness inside our congested metropolis harbouring interesting **biodiversity** which contributes to the micro-climate of the area. The Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh has over the years been using this area for birdwatching and has recorded the existence of a wide variety of bird life on this stretch of land and adjacent water regime. A list of the birds seen is enclosed for your information and reference. As the area was not disturbed up till now, by any impending changes to its physical features, we did not feel it necessary to draw the attention of concerned authorities towards it. After reading the above mentioned plans for development of

the area into an ornamental garden, we feel that this area has many inherent advantages which could be used with benefit for creating a Wild Bird Preserve Environmental Education Centre and other facilities for children.

"We believe that a practical and viable alternative can be planned for this area which will attract visitors without having to change the existing environment. An outline is enclosed. We shall be happy to discuss with you this plan on a convenient date. Meanwhile, we will be grateful if the present proposal as advertised is not proceeded with further."

PRESENT STATUS OF THE AREA

1. The area in question is completely overgrown with acacia (babool), ficus (banyan), neem and other trees and various types of bushes, etc.
2. It has interesting micro-habitats like reed-beds, marshes, open water, scrub, rock formations which are present cheek by jowl with the vegetation, etc.
3. It is host to the largest concentration of wintering waterfowl within the area of HUDA, comprising at least 8,000+ numbers of various migrant species like Shovellers and Pintails, from October to March/April each year.
4. It is also a gathering place of migrant wagtails before their return migration. Numbers in thousands gather here for days on end, prior to migration. Last year a hitherto unreported variety (from Andhra Pradesh) of the White Wagtail was reported from this very area!
5. During summer it is a breeding ground for resident waterfowl like cormorants, grebes, waterhen, etc.
6. Butterflies, dragonflies, reptiles, amphibians and other micro fauna, all of which have their own beneficial role in keeping viruses and insects in check and so benefit human populations.

HOW WILL THIS PROJECT CHANGE THIS SCENARIO ?

1. Once a Jetty is constructed directly at this point, motor-boats will begin to ply between Lumbini Park and this new garden, disturbing the wild waterfowl (ducks, waders, etc.) so much that they will abandon Hussain Sagar.
2. Changes in the present topography of the foreshore, which is a gently sloping ground covered with rough turf and bushes, will change the micro-habitat which welcomes the wagtails by providing abundant feeding material and an ideal habitat. If this happens, the wagtails will also abandon the area.
3. A place of natural wilderness offering its own attractions with very low costs of maintenance may be replaced by ornate gardens and structures that will not substitute the beauty of a wilderness (which is rare in an urban setting) and be too costly to maintain too.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN ALTERNATE PROPOSAL

1. Retain the wilderness and add moisture-loving trees, like barringtonia and acacia, on all vacant areas to attract migratory birds in consultation with Birdwatcher's Society of A.P. & Forest Dept. Have only natural trails inside the Wilderness Park and do not pave them. All new structures should be near existing structures near the gate.
2. Shift the proposed Jetty to a point nearer the Khairatabad flyover, arranging for continuous nature walk from the garden to be developed there through trees in the embankments adjacent to the northern side of the necklace road till they reach Wilderness Park. Electric buses can also ply from this point to the Wilderness Park.
3. Re-design the area identified for the Necklace Garden into an environmental education center and add a Snake Park and Butterfly enclosure for the city's children under the aegis of the state forest department and local environmental NGOs., with areas for dioramas of local wildlife and topography, a hall for screening environmental and wildlife films for the benefit of schools and the public in general.
4. Declare the area within an imaginary line extending from the identified plot, across the open water, upto Sanjivayya Park, as a **Wild Bird Preserve** where no disturbance should be allowed.
5. Start rock climbing lessons for children on top of the rock having a good flight of stairs and railings which the children will love.
6. Protect the area as a wild bird habitat and disallow encroachments, which disturb them, to develop.
7. Declare the whole area as a special education zone for school children.
8. Retain geographical topography of the area in its present form as far as possible. Plant more trees in consultation with the Birdwatcher's Society of A.P.
9. Along the entire Necklace Road, develop a cycle path to promote eco-friendly cycling.

HOW WILL THE PEOPLE BENEFIT ?

1. In today's world of increased environmental awareness a Wild Bird Preserve and Environmental Education Centre, in the hub of the city, will be a shining example of the government's commitment towards building a greener future for the citizens of the city in particular and through education, the state in general. It will send a positive message about the government's responsibility and action towards the environment to various national and international agencies.
2. The Wild Bird Preserve Environmental Education Centre, Snake Park, Butterfly enclosure and rock climbing will attract students, tourists and their attendant benefits.

EXAMPLES OF EXISTING URBAN WETLAND REFUGES IN INDIA

Adyar Estuary, Chennai; Mahim Creek, Mumbai; Mula-Mutha Bird Sanctuary, Pune; Bhopal Lake; Aurangabad Lake; Madras Snake Park, Chennai.

NGO SIGNATORIES TO THIS PROPOSAL

Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh; Society for Protection of Environment and Quality of Life; Society To Save Rocks; World Wide Fund for Nature - India. (A.P. State Office); Save The Lakes Society.

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names follow Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (1996, 12th ed.), classification, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1997. Notes, Abbreviations and Contributors are at the end.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills, Hyderabad
COMMON PARIAH KITE 16.9: N *c.* 30' up an un-id tree (AP); INDIAN PITTA 25.9: 1 dead bird in garden.

Hussain Sagar, Hyderabad (ST) 17.9
DABCHICK *c.* 50; LITTLE EGRET 3; SPOTBILL DUCK 2; COOT 8. PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 16.9: hrd (AP).

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park, Jubilee Hills (ST)
STONE CURLEW 7.9: 2 ad & 2 imm. 21.9: 4. COMMON PEAFOWL 21.9: 1M & 3 yng. WHITEHEADED BABBLER 21.9: An ad feeding a yng one.

Somajiguda, Hyderabad (RM) 30.9
INDIAN PITTA 1 on an eucalyptus tree.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Tondpalli Village, Shamshabad Mandal
PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 11.9: hrd (AP).

NELLORE DISTRICT (VS)

Tada, Pulicat Lake 16.8
OPENBILL STORK 100+ in flt near A.P. / T.N. border; FLAMINGO 300+ near boat landing area; SPOTBILL DUCK *c.* 140 roosting on Kongala Thitoo Is; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER 10; LESSER SAND PLOVER 4; CURLEW 3-4; GREENSHANK 1; SPOTTED SANDPIPER 2; COMMON SANDPIPER 1; LARGE INDIAN PRATINCOLE 1 in flt; CASPIAN TERN 1; LITTLE TERN 1 on Kongala Thittoo Is; COMMON SWALLOW Small numbers heading southward;

TAMIL NADU

CHENNAI DISTRICT (VS)

Guindy National Park, Chennai 15.8
POND HERON 1 of 12 in br plm Possibly N; WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN 1 juv; COUCAL A bird carrying N mat; COMMON SWALLOW 3-4 overhead; TAILOR BIRD V C. Hrd v freq. Br?

Nandanam, Chennai 15.8
LESSER GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER Active N, 4m. up *Melia azadirachta* tree. Contains nestlings (pers. comm. O T Ravindran).

Santhome, Chennai
HOUSE CROW 14.7: N with eggs / yng ones; JUNGLE CROW 18.8: Fledgling perched on small shrub.

COIMBATORE DISTRICT (VS)

Southern Forest Ranger's College, Coimbatore 23.7
GREY PARTRIDGE Hrd.

Top Slip, Indira Gandhi WL Sanctuary 23-25.7
MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH Carrying N mat to an abandoned building.

KANCHEEPURAM DISTRICT[2] (VS)

Acharapakkam Village 20/21.8
BLACK DRONGO Feeding yng at N on a telegraph pole.

Irumbedu Village, Cheyyur Taluk 20/21.8
TREE PIE Carrying N mat.

Lathoor, Cheyyur Taluk 20/21.8
GREEN SANDPIPER 2.

Madurantakam Tank 21.8
CORMORANT (sp. ?) 200+; GREY HERON 210+; GREY PELICAN 1; PAINTED STORK *c.* 15; WHITE IBIS 7-8; SPOONBILL 40+; FLAMINGO 34; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 10; SPOTBILL DUCK 120+; GARGANEY TEAL 150+, in non-br plm; COOT 100+; GREENSHANK 2-3; BLACKWINGED STILT 10.

Marudham Reserve Forest, Uthiramerur Taluk 20/21.8
SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1 in flt.

Puthali Tank, Uthiramerur Taluk 20/21.8
GARGANEY TEAL 20+; GREENSHANK 1; BLACKWINGED STILT *c.* 12.

Uthiramerur Tank, Uthiramerur Taluk 20/21.8
CATTLE EGRET *c.* 6.

Vedanthangal 21.8
DARTER 5; OPENBILL STORK 40-50 in paddies; WHITE IBIS 12 in fields; SPOONBILL 18 in flt.

Velacherry Marshes[3]
GREY HERON 13.7: 2 in flt. 27.7: 15-20; PURPLE HERON 13,27.7: *c.* 12; CHESTNUT BITTERN 13,27.7: Few. 24.8: Less C than Yellow, less than 10; YELLOW BITTERN 13, 27.7: Several. 24.8: C seen in the open during day. Many juv too; WHITENECKED STORK 13,27.7: 1 in flt; SPOTBILL DUCK 27.7: 4 in flt; INDIAN MOORHEN 24.8: Several inc yng & juv; PURPLE MOORHEN 13.7: 30-40, many disp under-tail coverts, also vocal; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 13.7: 1-2 in flt. 27.7: 5-6. 24.8: *c.* 30 inc juv & some yng birds; SPOTTED SANDPIPER 13.7: 2. 27.7: 10-15. 24.8: 4-5; BLACKWINGED STILT 27.7: 2 in flt; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 13,27.7: Hrd and seen; SWALLOW (sp. ?) 13.7: 30-40 heading towards reeds at dusk; COMMON SWALLOW 27.7: 4 in flt. 24.8: *c.* 300 flying low over water & reeds; HOUSE CROW 27.7: N with 2-3 yng on a pylon; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL 27.7: A fly of 2 ad & 2 yng.

NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT (VS)

Sholingur 30-31.8
LARGE GREY BABBLER Near Sholingur on Arakkonam road.

TIRUVALLUR DISTRICT (VS)

Palayanoor, Tiruttani Taluk 30-31.8
POND HERON Small numbers in fields; LARGE GREY BABBLER; BAYA WEAVER BIRD N at several sites with birds.

Pandravedu Eri, Pallipat Taluk 31.8
DABCHICK 500; INDIAN SHAG 300; POND HERON 350; COMMON SANDPIPER 10-20.

Poondi Reservoir 31.8
GREY PELICAN 4; CORMORANT sp? 1000+; CATTLE EGRET 10-20. GLOSSY IBIS 2; COOT 4000-5000; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 10-15; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER Few; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 3-4; SPOTTED SANDPIPER Few; BLACKWINGED STILT 10-15.

Veeramangalam, Pallipat Taluk 30-31.8
LARGE GREY BABBLER.

NOTES:
[1] Now Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

[2] Formerly Chingleput District.
[3] Also known as Pallikaranai Marshes.

ABBREVIATIONS:
ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP), Rajiv Mathew (RM), Siraj Taher (ST), V. Santharam (VS).

NOTES & NEWS

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of members of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh will be held on Friday, 24th October 1997 at 6.30 p.m. at the Conference Hall, Administrative Building, JNTU College of Fine Arts, Opp. Mahavir Hospital, Masab Tank, Hyderabad 500 028. You are requested to attend the meeting:

AGENDA

1. **Honorary Secretary's Report.**
2. **Presentation of accounts by Honorary Treasurer.**
3. **Election of an Executive Committee under Rule 30.**
4. **Appointment of Auditors.**
5. **Any other business.**

Note:- Only those persons who have paid their membership for the year 1997-1998 are eligible to attend the AGM and cast their votes. Members can pay their membership dues before the commencement of the AGM and attend the meeting.

If time permits, there will be a short slide show for members, after the General Body Meeting.

Mr M K Kashinath has generously donated to the Society, a set of 15 slides on **Cranes** of the world and 5 on prarie flowers, bought from the International Crane Foundation, Wisconsin.

The popular "Tick-List," ***Common Birds of Hyderabad Region*** is available once again, thanks to a generous donation from our member, Mr N G Reddy. Bird names have been rearranged alphabetically for ease of use by all birdwatchers. A set of 10 cards will be sold for Rs. 20/- to members and Rs 25/- to non-members, who may collect them from the Honorary Secretary.

According to a report in *Financial Express* (27-9-1997), Coromandel Fertilizer Limited's plant at Visakhapatnam has become a haven for birds. The first step was taken by none other than the CEO of the Murugappa Group, Mr Subbaiah, when he wondered whether his supervisors and officers had seen any birds? They soon realised that birds would come where there are trees and so began planting **trees** with a passion. Now 53 birds (species?) are said to visit the plant. Moreover, birdwatching has become a hobby of the workers and their children, who try to draw the birds in scrap books!

VITAL STATISTICS

The decline of **waterbirds** in **Alaska** since 1977, according to a recent aerial survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

Eider: 90%
Old-squaw: 75%
Red-throated Loon: 58%
Goldeneye: 45%
Bufflehead: 42%
Scoter: 40%
Common Loon: 19%

[*Audubon* 99(3): 26. May-June 1997]

"World Birdwatch as you may be aware is a global programme of BirdLife International. It is to be held on 4-5 October 1997 and extended up to 12th as NTT World Bird Count '97. One of the major objectives of the 'World Birdwatch' is to create public awareness on the need for conservation of birds. With over 1,111 birds threatened with global extinction, action to save them needs to be expedited. The most serious threat to birds throughout the world is loss of habitat; forests are being felled, wetlands drained and natural grasslands either destroyed by over grazing or used for intensive agriculture. In India more than 100 species of birds are threatened. Our work on the preparation of the Red Data Book is in progress and we will have a more clear idea about the status of these birds when we complete this project in 1998. I am writing this to request you to organize a birdwatching trip in your area (any habitat that you may choose), as part of our national programme of 'World Birdwatch.' You may cover one or two kilometer area in your locality, if it is a terrestrial habitat. In case you plan to organize birdwatching in a wetland, you may please note the area covered and the time taken. We would appreciate if you could take school students and teachers with you. The number of birds sighted of each species may be recorded separately and sent to us before the end of October. We will compile this and produce a report. It is very essential to give the names of all the participants as we wish to include them in the report, a copy of which will be sent to you." [Dr V S Vijayan, Director, SACON *in litt.* 26-9-1997]. (*Editor's Note:-* Lists may be sent to the BSAP for forwarding to SACON).

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh — No. 79 : November 1997

14/11/97

PROGRAMME

Ind. 15/4/2001

FIELD OUTING: Members should reach destination by themselves at 8.00 a.m. The trip will be for a half day. Please bring lunch, water, etc., as required.

23-11-1997: Shamirpet Lake : Members are requested to meet at the tourism complex at Shamirpet.

NOTES & NEWS

The **Annual General Meeting of the Society** was held on 24th October 1997, at 6.30 p.m. in the Conference Hall, JNTU College of Fine Arts, Masab Tank. The meeting was called to order by the President and proceeded as per the Agenda. After the reports of the Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer were read out, the out-going Executive Committee presented to the general body, a list of proposed members for the new committe. This list was accepted by the general body unanimously. The new Excecutive Committe comprises of Mr Pushp Kumar, Mr Siraj Taher, Mr N G Reddy, Mr Aasheesh Pittie, Mr Rajeev Mathew, Mr M S Kulkarni, Mr K Bharadwaj, Mr Hashim Tyabji, Mr Walter Sanjeev Rao and Mr N Sunil Kumar. Office-bearers of the Society will be elected in the first meeting of the new Exec. Committee and will be announced in the next *Pitta*. Other matters discussed at the AGM were:

- Change in name of Society.
- Increase of membership fees.
- Designing and registration of a new logo for the Society.

The General Body authorised the Exec. Committee to look into these matters and deal with them in an appropriate way. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

Wetlands International seeks to focus world attention on Africa's wetlands in order to attract support for their wise use and conservation. The **2nd International Conference on WET-LANDS & DEVELOPMENT**, is being organized by Wetlands Internatinal, from 8-14 November 1998 at Dakar, Senegal. It is hosted by the Government of Senegal in cooperation with IUCN and WWF. It will incorporate the 1st Meeting of the Board of Wetlands International. The Conference will address three broad issues:

- Turning legislation and policies for wetlands and wetland biodiversity into meaningful on-the-ground action.
- Equipping local communities with tools to promote the wise use of wetlands.
- Identifying new approaches for financing the conservationa and wise use of wetlands.

For more information about the conference, contact: Wetlands International, Marijkeweg 11, PO Box 7002, 6700 AC Wageningen, The Netherlands. E-mail: post@wetlands.agro.nl. A 2nd announcement including registration forms and a call for papers and posters will be circulated in November 1997.

The **Harini Nature Conservation Foundation**, promoted by Dr Bharat Bhushan, was established in 1994 and has subsequently been registered as a non-profit NGO. The objectives of the Foundation, as per its Memorandum of Association, are:

- To promote educational development and environment (protection and conservation).
- To propagate, impart and adopt any audio-visual methods for promoting environmental education, education administration and rural development.
- To advance public education in and promote research on the ecology, conservation and management of the natural environment.

The Foundation invites membership under various heads: Privileged Patron (Rs. 300/- p.a.), National Associate (Rs. 200/- p.a.) or Resident Associate (Rs. 100/- p.a.). Further information may be obtained from: Harini Nature Conesrvation Foundation, 27 Usha Building, 86 Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Wadala, Mumbai 400031. E-mail: bharat.pritvi@axcess.net.in.

A **National Workshop on Biodiversity and Sustainable Development** is being organized at Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai, from 15-17 December 1997. The themes of the workshop are:

- Status and overview of ecosystems.
- Role of participatory management for natural resources and protected areas.
- Biodiversity information system - networking needs.
- Valuation methodologies - case studies.
- Indicators for policy planning and monitoring.
- Resource allocation policies at local, regional, state and national levels for sustainable development.

For further details contact: Capacity 21 Project Office, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, General Vaidya Marg, Goregaon (E), Mumbai 400065. E-mail: hemant@igidr.ac.in / radha@igidr.ac.in.

BINOCULARS FOR SALE: Hard coated, triple tested Zenith binoculars, 20x50 magnification, with leather case. Expected price Rs. 1,500. Contact: S Ashok Kumar, # 491, Road No. 10, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad 500033. Phone: 238550.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—10

> "As man can produce, and certainly has produced, a great result by his methodical and unconscious means of selection, what may not natural selection effect? ..... Man selects only for his own good: Nature only for that of the being which she tends. Every selected character is fully exercised by her, as is implied by the fact of their selection. Man keeps the natives of many climates in the same country; he seldom exercises each selected character in some peculiar and fitting manner; he feeds a long- and a short-beaked pigeon on the same food; ..... He does not allow the most vigorous males to struggle for the females. He does not rigidly destroy all inferior animals, but protects during each varying season, as far as lies in his power, all his productions. ..... How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! How short his time! and consequently how poor will be his results, compared with those accumulated by Nature during whole geological periods! Can we wonder, then, that Nature's productions should be far "truer" in character than man's productions; that they should be infinitely better adapted to the most complex conditions of life, and should plainly bear the stamp of far higher workmanship?"
>
> (Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 1859: 93-94)

Darwin wrote his astoundingly important evolutionary treatise long before the science of Genetics saw light of day a half century later, when the 20th Century began. From 1866, when the Austrian monk Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) wrote his path-breaking (but initially ignored!) paper on plant hybridism, using garden peas in his experiments, we have come a long way in understanding the building blocks of life, how characters are inherited and how genetic information flows from DNA (deoxyribose nucleic acid) outwards. James Watson and Francis Crick broke the genetic code in 1953 and discovered the chemical structure (a double helix) of the DNA molecule, with alternating sugar and phosphate units, each sugar unit carrying one of four bases (adenine, thymine, guanine or cytosine). We are now 'on a high', experimenting irresponsibly with what we term "Genetic Engineering" (isn't this any anomaly?), producing clones of 'perfect' sheep like Dolly and utilizing animal genes to grow better marketable tomatoes (what will confirmed vegetarians say ?). But, like Darwin stated, Nature's productions (as against modern man's) *are* far truer in character, infinitely better adapted and also bear the stamp of far higher workmanship.

In our greed to make more 'profit' and in our misplaced sentiment in trying to cure inferior, sickly and unproductive individuals, whether plant, animal or human, we may be actually missing the whole point of natural selection and how only the fittest can really survive (more correctly, their genes). Our ego and, more particularly, our poor knowledge of Nature's balance and laws leads us to believe that only *we* have the power of driving to extinction our other living co-habitors on earth. Little do we realize that it is the human race which is in greatest danger of obliteration and that there are too many millions of other 'meek', unknown or tiny animal and plant species which will go on evolving, adapting and surviving, long after we are gone. The only hope of any *Homo sapiens* enduring could be one or more tribal communities tucked away in some still unexplored jungle, who worship the five elements and have harmonized with Nature.

So, when we encroach on the millennia-old habitats of birds and other animals' and plant ecosystems, we threaten the continued existence of species that *Nature* has selected. Are we then going to be left only with the "MCPs" of the feathered kind—Mynas, Crows and a *Passer* (or Pigeon)—which have adapted to our mostly treeless, urban concrete jungles? What we desperately and quickly required is to obtain top-class education about *restoration* of our ecosystems, urban and agricultural, and not pursue this dubious, impractical 'sustainable development' idea which has little scientific (ecological) basis, whatever these environmentalists may say.

Ignore and resist the life-styles of the 'rich and powerful' who are ruling us through wasteful industry and corrupt, inefficient governance and then the hundreds of flycatchers, warblers, thrushes and woodpeckers will re-emerge to keep insect populations down, allow wild plants to flourish and may be enable a once clean and fresh Kodaikanal to turn away the crows, mynas and sparrows which followed 'progressive' humans and their garbage, through urbanization. It is *not* western culture that is life-threatening to us, rather it is this insidious, much publicized and advertised urban (wasteful spending) life-style which spells doom for all the earlier goodness of human civilization. Overpopulation only threatens metropolises and towns; villages sparsely dotting the vast open countryside in our sub-continent and the uninhabited jungles and semi-desert areas haven't experienced this urban malaise, yet. Is this 'urban consumerism' the intellect of human selection?

If you want to find out how Nature selects its best wildlife of great character, then you must get out into its wonderland (like Alice did!) and observe its creations and their centuries-old life-styles, which puts our own manner of living and energy use (and waste!) to shame. *This* has been the charm (and the wisdom) of the study of Natural History over the past three centuries and more, carried out by eccentric men tromping the forests, stalking animals and searching for plants, like Alexander von Humboldt and Henry Bates in South America, David Livingstone and Henry Stanley in Africa the 'Dark Continent', or Joseph Hooker and Alfred Wallace in Hindostan or the Malay Archipelago.

There is another matter I feel I should clarify here, especially to educate our hyper-nationalistic individuals who stamp their feet with pride and gloat about the natural products *we* have given the world, like some spices (black pepper, cloves, mace, turmeric, cardamom, cinnamon, basil, nutmeg) and sugarcane, for instance. But how many of us realize that much of the items that make up our daily food really come from far away, even as far as Central America—potato, tomato, brinjal, chillies, onion, garlic, okra and coffee, wheat, barley, maize, soybean, cabbage, mustard, radish, carrot, pineapple, watermelon, sapota, guava, papaya, apple, grape and perhaps even tamarind! Even the cow we Hindoos worship is alien to this land (introduced by immi-

grating Aryans), more than half of the milk we use every day coming from our indigenous, lowly, buffalo. It would be interesting to quickly but scientifically analyse how much of what we urbanites use as food, clothing and housing (*roti, kapda aur makaan*) is really indigenous (or 'swadeshi' to use a Gandhian term) and how much is exotic, imported. You would be very surprised, you patriots and activists baying for patenting rights for 'our' natural products we actually *share* with other countries, like Sarpagandha (*Rauvolfia serpentina*) and neem (*Azadirachta indica*) for example. Even the sandalwood (*Santalum album*) tree is native of the Lesser Sunda Islands in Indonesia!

So, rather than make 'ignorant noise' abou our 'endemic' biodiversity (endemism here is again a highly controversial and muddled concept, little researched), though using western printed knowledge 'free', and then unfairly and shortsightedly banning or discouraging *genuine* foreign researchers wanting to *collaborate* with Indian scientists, it is time we grew up and matured, internationally, for mutual benefit. Intelligent *selection* in anything we do or produce or adopt is the key, and not being mesmerized (or bribed) into importing, producing or marketing unnecessary trash (costly 'consumer goods'), which, ironically, seems to attract money with ease, falling human standards and values being the cause. Look at bird *diversity* in natural, undisturbed ecosystems (natural selection) and compare it with that in modified rural and urban habitats (human 'selection') and you'll understand what I mean. Creativity, not sterile imitation, is what is needed here in all spheres, and besides one's natural talent, some hard, *quality training* is also required, from an experienced Master or whom we once used to revere as a '*Guru*'!

—Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé

(Editor's Note:- The opinions expressed in the above essay are the author's own and do not in any way convey the editorial policy of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh.)

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1997. Notes, Abbreviations and Contributors are at the end.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills, Hyderabad (AP)
INDIAN PITTA 22.10: 1 in garden (ST); GREY DRONGO 6.10: 1. 27.10: *c.* 6; BROWNBREASTED FLYCATCHER 27.10: 1; RUFOUSTAILED FLYCATCHER 27.10: 1; REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER 4.10: 1, 27.10; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 27.10: 1 M, 3 imm.; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 27.10: 1 imm. M, 1 F; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER 27.10: 1.

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park
PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 4.10: 1 imm., brownish plm., with pinkish lower bill (AP); GREY SHRIKE 4.10: 1 imm. (AP); BRAHMINY MYNA 4.10: 1 imm. (AP); BLACKHEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE 2.10: 1 ad., with 2 juv. (HT); DULL GREEN LEAF WARBLER 8.10 (HT); BLACK REDSTART 4.10: 1 (AP); PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD 2.10: 1 juv. (HT); PURPLE SUNBIRD 4.10: M in non-br., plm. (AP).

Madhapur, Jubilee Hills 25.10 (HT)
MONTAGU'S HARRIER 1 M.

Mozamjahi Market, Hyderabad 24.10 (ST)
PARIAH KITE 1 carrying N-mat.

Qutub Shahi Tombs, Hyderabad 11.10 (HT)
ASHY WREN-WARBLER 1 ad., 2 juv; PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD Abundant. 1 ad. in br. plm. Juv., with orange mouths & black legs. Feeding on insects on *Ber* plant; PURPLE SUNBIRD 1 M, 1 juv., ad. in winter plm.

Somajiguda, Hyderabad 12-14.10 (RM)
RUFOUSTAILED FLYCATCHER 1.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru 12.10 (CTH)
COMB DUCK 10 without knobs; MONTAGU'S HARRIER; MARSH HARRIER; KESTREL; COMMON SANDPIPER; STINT *Calidris* sp.; RUFF 1 M; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER; RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE Commoner than during monsoon; BROWN SHRIKE Abundant.; BLACK DRONGO Many imm. with bellies speckled white; YELLOWEYED BABBLER 4 imm without red eye, 1 ad; RUFOUSTAILED FLYCATCHER 1; STONE CHAT; WAGTAIL *Motacilla* sp.; BAYA on N.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Anantgiri, Vikarabad Mandal 19.10 (AP)
RED SPURFOWL 3; COPPERSMITH 1 bird const., N on lower side of horizontal branch, *c.* 25' up in a mango tree; GREY DRONGO; RUFOUSTAILED FLYCATCHER 1.

Shamirpet Lake 28.9 (RM)
GREENSHANK; GREEN SANDPIPER; SPOTTED SANDPIPER; COMMON SANDPIPER; SYKES'S CRESTED LARK 30-40; RICHARD'S (PADDYFIELD) PIPIT 2.

MAHARASHTRA

MUMBAI DISTRICT

Borivli National Park[1] 11.2.1996 (VKP)
GREYNECKED BUNTING A flock on a Ghost Tree *Sterculia urens*.

TAMIL NADU[@]

CHENNAI DISTRICT (VS)

Adyar Estuary
FLAMINGO 16-17.9: 1; GARGANEY 12.10: 4-5; GREY PLOVER (?)16-17.9: Hrd; EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER 27.9: 1; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER 16-17.9: Few; LESSER SAND PLOVER 16-17.9: *c.* 12; WHIMBREL 16-17.9: 4; CURLEW 16-17.9: 10; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 27.9: 3; COMMON REDSHANK 16-17.9: 70+; MARSH SANDPIPER 16-17.9: 1; BLACKWINGED STILT 16-17.9: 100+; AVOCET 16-17.9: 1; CASPIAN TERN 12.10: 1 in flt.; SPOTTED DOVE 12.10: In disp., flt.; LESSER PIED KINGFISHER 16-17.9: 3; BLACK DRONGO 16-17.9: In tail moult; YELLOW WAGTAIL 16-17.9: 1 in flt.

Guindy National Park
HONEY BUZZARD 12.10: 1 in flt.; BOOTED HAWK-EAGLE 12.10: 2 in flt. 1 dark & 1 light phase; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO 12.10: Hrd.; KOEL 12.10: Hrd., juv., begging; INDIAN PITTA 12.10: 4-5

hrd., at dusk; GREY DRONGO 12.10: 2; BROWN FLYCATCHER 12.10: 1; FOREST WAGTAIL 14.9: 3-4 singly, in flt.

Santhome, Chennai city 12.10
POND HERON* 19.10: 6 in flt. 21.10: 2 flocks; 28.10: Several; On all days birds heading south.; CATTLE EGRET* 3.10: 100+ in flt., heading south; CURLEW 20.9: 18 in flt., heading north; HOUSE CROW 21.10: 1 chick on ground.; MAGPIE-ROBIN 12.10: Hrd.

Alwarpet, Chennai city 5.10
KOEL: Yng., hrd., begging for food.

Luz, Chennai city 4.10
FOREST WAGTAIL: 2-3 in flt.

Boat Club, Chennai city
GREY DRONGO 24.10: 1; BROWN FLYCATCHER 24.10: 1 hrd.; MAGPIE-ROBIN 24.10: Hrd.; FOREST WAGTAIL 23, 24.10: 1-2 in flt.

KANCHEEPURAM DISTRICT[2] (VS)

Velacherry Marshes[3] 23.9
MARSH HARRIER 3-4 Females/juv.

- **Chembarambakkam Tank, Sriperumbudur Taluq** 28.9
BLACK BITTERN 1 in flt.; SPOTBILL DUCK 100+; GULBILLED TERN 5-6 in winter plm.; BLACK DRONGO *c.* 50% in tail moult.

- **Madas Christian College Campus, Tambaram** 26.10
GREY DRONGO 6-7; BLACKHEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE 1 male; RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER 2; COMMON BABBLER Hrd., calls; BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER Hrd.; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1 female; DULL GREEN LEAF WARBLER Several hrd.

TIRUVALLUR DISTRICT (VS)

Poondi 21.9
GREY PELICAN 9; MARSH HARRIER 1 female/juv.; COOT 1000+; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 50+, non-br., plm.; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 25+; MARSH SANDPIPER 10-15; BAYBACKED SHRIKE 2-3. Hrd., a warbler-like "churr".; BLACK DRONGO > 80% in tail moult. 2-3 yng.; FOREST WAGTAIL 1 in flt.; YELLOW WAGTAIL *c.* 6; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD Hrd., singing.

NOTES:
@ A few 'common' species have been included due to their local rarity.
* Author suspects local movement coinciding with the onset of NE and SW Monsoon.
[1] Now Sanjay Gandhi National Park.
[2] Formerly Chingleput District.
[3] Also known as Pallikaranai Marshes.

ABBREVIATIONS:
Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP), C Tom Hash (CTH), Hashim Tyabji (HT), Rajiv Mathew (RM), Siraj Taher (ST), V K Paralkar (VKP), V Santharam (VS).

BOOK REVIEW

Ahmed, A. (1997): Live Bird Trade In Northern India, TRAFFIC-India.

Of the approximately 1,228 bird species in India, more than a fourth figure in the bird trade in one way or another in Northern India alone. A look through Abrar Ahmed's book, makes the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, a sham and, the reports and utterances of the government authorities, (Forest and Environment Departments), a mockery of the ground realities. "The reasons for this flourishing trade, though illegal, are many," says Abrar.

This is a very well documented and produced report of 104 pages published by WWF-India, covering all aspects of the bird trade, its methods, utilization of the trapped bird, socio-economic factors and the bird species involved, including the volume of trade and prices. The printing and get-up is good and so are the photographs which are interesting and different from regular bird pictures. An Appendix and various maps and graphs make it a lucid and useful book. Abrar admittedly has to act '*a la* Sherlock Holmes' to achieve his goal. Started in 1993, as it progressed, inadequacies of time and methodology were realized. Despite difficulties, the author has taken trouble to make his field work and the report as complete as possible.

The data was collected between October 1992 and August 1994 during 67 surveys conducted in 57 trading / trapping areas in 36 north Indian cities. It revealed that more than 250 species of birds were being traded in, in the north Indian markets alone. It is startling that of these 250 species, 16 are in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. 36 species are listed under CITES and 3 included in the IUCN's Red Data List.

According to the report about 100,000 birds are traded annually, with parakeets and munias occupying the top place. Majority of the birds trapped are for pets, food or release with smaller numbers being for the zoo, medicinal purposes or black magic. Prices ranged from Re 1/- to a few thousands. Case studies of some important species involved in the trade are discussed as also the categories, methods, specialized skills and the socio-economic aspects of the bird trappers are briefly surveyed. The author admits the lack of knowledge and data on the subject and the need for similar surveys in the rest of the country.

In the end it becomes glaringly clear that when a single, motivated individual could gather so much information and data on bird-trappers and their trade, what prevents the authorities from taking action under the requisite Laws? Abrar Ahmed's recommendations need to be discussed by wildlife experts and animal trade groups for strict implementation of Wildlife Protection Acts, CITES and TRAFFIC regulations. He also deserves accolades for his efforts and a hope that a similar survey will be taken up in southern India also.

— Siraj Taher

For Private Circulation Only

For more information write to: Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh, P.O. Box 45, Banjara Hills Post Office, Hyderabad 500034.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher. **Membership** (Rs): Admission=10; Ordinary=35; Student=15 per annum; Life=500. **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in

PITTA

16/12/97

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh **No. 80 : December 1997**

PROGRAMME

Updated : 15/2/01

FIELD OUTING: Members should reach destination by themselves at 8.00 a.m. The trip will be for a half day. Please bring lunch, water, etc., as required.

21-12-1997: Ibrahimpatnam Lake : Members are requested to meet on the bund of the lake. APSRTC bus route # 277 from Women's College, Koti and Imliban bus depot terminates at Ibrahimpatnam village, but will stop on request on the bund.

EDITORIAL

Visits to different places during the last couple of months confirmed my views on the importance of large enclosed areas in protecting iwldlife in manageable habitats. Government and private organisations in recent years have acquired and fenced large areas of land, from a hundred acres to a couple of thousand (ICRISAT Campus - 3,500 acres). These areas though relatively small have varied habitats and are being automatically protected from the ravages of urbanisation, development and vandalism. In Andhra Pradesh some such places are Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park (Hyderabad), which was originally a walled private property, ICRISAT Asia Center (Medak District), A.P. Police Academy and S.V.P. Police Academy, Hyderabad Central University and Indian Immunologicals Ltd., (all in Rangareddi District) and Sriharikota Rocket Launching Center (Nellore District). The Raj Bhavans in Chennai and Pune, YASHADA Complex (Pune), Indian Institute of Science (Bangalore), as also the Simpson Estate in Chennai and Nagarjuna Fertilizers and Chemicals Limited complex (Kakinada, A.P.), are all places of varied natural habitat with their typical flora and fauna. When the head of these organisations is a motivated person, there is likely to be minimal development and disturbance and the importance, variety and charm of these habitats increases manifold. During the last few years members of this Society have visited and enjoyed birdwatching in most of these areas. There are extremely important micro-habitats in almost all such protected places whose birds have been observed which cannot be seen outside these campuses. Almost all areas have at least one significant water-body, patches or even stretches of grassland, scrub and bushes, GREENlands and trees, and also gardens.

Though the state Forest Department has also opened up parks and sanctuaries, most such places are suffering form external and other pressures resulting in neglect, encroachments and lack of management which in turn is bringing about their end. So there seems to be some hope in privately- or corporate-owned and managed areas which may be the life savers of the natural flora and small fauna of the area. These areas will not be able to protect the elephant, the tiger, leopard or the lion, but looking beyond these, there may just be a flicker of hope for the others.

—Siraj Taher

NOTES & NEWS

The **Executive Committee** met on 29 November 1997 and elected the following persons as the office bearers of the Society for the 2 year period ending 31 March 1999.

President	Mr Siraj Taher	Res: 3352607
Vice-Presidents	Mr N G Reddy	Res: 238382
	Mr Walter S Rao	Res: 849748
Honorary Secretary	Mr Aasheesh Pittie	Res: 3350683
Honorary Treasurer	Mr K Bharadwaj	Res: 248343

It was decided to revise the membership fees of the Society from 1 April 1998 as given below. However, till that date, the existing fee structure will remain.

Membership Category	Fees in Rupees	
Admission	20/-	
Ordinary	100/-	per annum
Student (till 10th class only)	25/-	per annum
Life	1000/-	
Corporate (compounded)	5000/-	for 20 years

The Society's field trip to Shamirpet on 23 November 1997 was well attended. There were many first-timers too. It was overcast most of the time, with a nippy breeze in the early hours. The environs of Shamirpet are a sad sight. The broken rocky country around the lake, a favoured habitat for myriad forms of life, including many species of birds, is being methodically destroyed by haphazard granite quarrying. There is absolutely no method in the madness! It seems as though every stone above ground, irrespective of its size, is fair game. Constant blasting of stone and the other allied activities of movement of men and vehicles is a source of great disturbance. The worst hit by this activity seems to be the duck family. Shamirpet has always had a rich diversity of migratory waterfowl. On this trip we saw only 2 Spotbill Ducks! The argument of wrong time, wrong day may have its plus points, but the devastation all around is starkly visible and cannot be denied. If things move in their logical sequence of events (from past experience), the lake will become a dumping ground for garbage, land will be reclaimed and gradually the waterbody choked into so much more real estate. Property developers are running amuck in the Shamirpet region. As we

continue to grow the city into regions where city planners arrive only after everything has been 'destroyed and developed', all the fringe areas around the city will be vandalized. Fox Sagar is a standing example of this. Will Shamirpet last another 5 years?

Glimpses of wilderness which quicken our heartbeats; a pair of Redheaded Merlins hunting together, a harrier quartering where open ground meets fenced scrub, a Pied Kingfisher diving in abandon into water for a beak full of fish, the astonishing variety of butterflies, even the minuscule medicinal herb which only a discerning eye can espy in shallow marshy areas, the endemic, endangered and insectivorous *Drosera indica*—will become mere memories unless our planners realise that their call of duty lies beyond the scope of just measuring land and constructing upon it!

Kenn Kaufman on why he stopped being a **lister** and.....

"I think I'd reached the point where it wasn't really doing anything for me. I mean, in the early stages of birding, keeping a list—keeping life lists, or a yard list, county lists, whatever—gives you an incentive to get out, and I think it's good in that way. I mean, I'm not anti-listing. There are a lot of good things about it. And I know a lot of cases where someone decides to work on their county list and as a result they discover a whole lot about the distribution of birds, and all sorts of good discoveries come out of it. But I was really interested in studying how to identify birds, and working on a list doesn't do a thing for teaching you how to identify birds. Because what you really need to do is spend more time looking at things even when you already know what they are, studying and taking in details. For me, I was living in Arizona. I had a life list that was way up there and a big Arizona state list. But I got to the point where if I wanted to study identification, then it meant sitting at some particular pond and spending hours just looking in great detail at the Baird's Sandpipers or something. Whereas, if I wanted to work on my list, what I would have to do would be to dash around from one pond to the next, or call the hotlines and go driving five hours out to the other edge of the state to look for something out there (and maybe not see it). So it required a completely different mindset. I figured that I really wasn't going to learn the fine points of identifying birds if I still had this incentive of chasing the birds for my list, so I just stopped. Then when I started traveling to other countries, I never got around to adding up, say, what happens if I add my Venezuela birds to the ones from Costa Rica and Mexico. I never added up a world life list. And there's been so much lumping and splitting that now I don't have the foggiest idea of how many species I've seen in any geographic area. Except my back yard, and my wife keeps the list for that."

.....what makes him want to study a bird in such fine detail.

"I really want to know it. It's just not that satisfying to go out, and a bunch of sparrows fly up, and somebody says one was the Baird's sparrow, and you sort of check it off. There's no satisfaction to that. Getting to the point where you know it's different, you can see that it's different—a lot of it is the appreciation factor, being able to know that this really is a different species. There aren't any two species that just diff in one field mark. If they're different species, there are goin to be a lot of subtle differences between them. And if you g to see all of those, then you are learning more about the worl You have a better understanding of the world around you you can get some sense of how this species fits into it."
(©Diane Porter, 1997).

"I am sure you will all be delighted to hear that three **Siberia Cranes**—a pair with a chick—arrived in **Keoladeo Nationa Park** today, 17th November. It was a cloudy morning and the were sighted by forest guard Sohan Lal between 11 a.m. an 12 noon. None of the birds are banded.

"Siberian Cranes are one of the most endangere birds in the world. Keoladeo is the only known winterin ground of the central population that nests in the Kunova Basin in Siberia. They usually depart Kunovat in late Augus and their arduous migration of several thousand kilometers, i believed to take them across six countries—Russia, Uzbeki stan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

"Last year, three adult Siberian Cranes arrived i Keoladeo on the morning of 16th November 1996, which wa the earliest date they had reached there for more than a dec ade. In 1993, five birds arrived on January 13th, and in 199 after an absence of three years—four birds arrived on Febru ary 1st."
(Belinda Wright in: nathistory-india@lists.princeton.edu)

A roost of some 80 **Pallas' Eagle** (a Red Data Book bird) i Tanguar Haor—a vast wetland in remote Rangchi village o Tahirpur in Sunamganj District of **Bangladesh**—is threat ened by tree felling. The birds nest in Rangchi village, an this threat to their roost may induce them to desert their nest ing sites too, thus endangering their very survival in Bangla desh, feel local birdwatchers. [Shehab Ahmed, *Daily Star* Dhaka, Bangladesh, Nov. 25, 1997 (from nathistory india@lists.princeton.edu)].

A man who used a golf club to kill a flightless **Nene goose** i the first person convicted and sentenced for a crime agains Hawaii's state bird. Terry Purpus, 53, was fined $4,000 Friday and ordered to perform 300 hours of community service fo killing the bird, an endangered species. A six-month jail term was suspended. "This is not only a crime against one bird This is a crime against the future of the species," state De partment of Land and Natural Resources chairman Michael Wilson said. Only 30 nene were known to exist in 1950. With the help of wildlife biology programs, there are now 800 to 1,000 living in the wild in Hawaii. Purpus initially pleaded innocent, saying the male bird had attacked him on July 23 at a golf course on the island of Maui. He later pleaded no con test to both charges of cruelty to animals and prohibited ac tivities against indigenous or endangered wildlife [rdanca@ix.netcom.com (Richard A. Danca) in (Wildlife Ecology Digest: wildside@saber.net)]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—11

"THE Ganges, though flowing from the foot of Vishnu and through Siva's hair, is not an ancient stream. Geology, looking further than religion, knows of a time when neither the river nor the Himalayas that nourished it existed, and an ocean flowed over the holy places of Hindustan. The mountains rose, their debris silted up the ocean, the gods took their seats on them and contrived the river, and the India we call immemorial came into being. But India is really far older. In the days of the prehistoric ocean the southern part of the peninsula already existed, and the high places of Dravidia have been land since land began, and have seen on the one side the sinking of a continent that joined them to Africa, and on the other the upheaval of the Himalayas from a sea. They are older than anything in the world. No water has ever covered them, and the sun who has watched them for countless aeons may still discern in their outlines forms that were his before our globe was torn from his bosom. If flesh of the sun's flesh is to be touched anywhere, it is here, among the incredible antiquity of these hills.

"Yet even they are altering. As Himalayan India rose, this India, the primal, has been depressed, and is slowly re-entering the curve of the earth. It may be that in aeons to come an ocean will flow here too, and cover the sun-born rocks with slime. Meanwhile the plain of the Ganges encroaches on them with something of the sea's action. They are sinking beneath the newer lands. Their main mass is untouched, but at the edge their outposts have been cut off and stand knee-deep, throat-deep, in the advancing soil. There is something unspeakable in these outposts. They are like nothing else in the world, and a glimpse of them makes the breath catch. They rise abruptly, insanely, without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills elsewhere, they bear no relation to anything dreamt or seen. To call them 'uncanny' suggests ghosts, and they are older than all spirit."

(E.M.Forster, *A Passage to India*, 1924: 123-124)

India of today is an amalgam of complex prehistoric events. Research on plate tectonics, geology and palaeontology tells of an ancient southern hemisphere super-continent, Gondwanaland, comprising of what now are South America, Africa, Arabia, Madagascar, peninsular India, New Guinea, Australia and Antarctica. It is being debated whether the Indochinese peninsula and the East Indies were also part of Gondwanaland or not. E.M. Forster wrote beautifully, and his passage quoted above is a near accurate description of what happened to Primal India ("Dravidia"—what an apt name for peninsular India!) when it drifted across the Indian Ocean northward for many million years since the Cretaceous and ploughed into the Tethys Sea washing the southern coast of Eurasia. Thrusting more northward, Dravidia or the Greater Indian Plate raised what now are the highest mountain ranges in the world, the Himalayas, and also the Tibetan Plateau. The Tethys Sea silted up and turned into an extensive west-east tract of marshland and bog where the one-horned rhinoceros, wild buffalo, swamp deer and hog-deer (and also many extinct mammals whose living descendants now roam Africa) trod the earth and the Pink-headed Duck (106) paddled and flapped over the wetlands, together with other species like the White-winged GREEN Duck (116), Comb Duck (115), Spotbill (97) and the Whistling Teals (88 & 89). A prehistoric river, the "Indo-Brahm", is thought to have then existed in what now are the Indo-Gangetic Plains, flowing westward from the Assam-Burma Highlands which the Indian Plate contacted first and elevated.

Besides pushing up the mountain ranges (Baluchistan, N.W.F.P., W. & E. Himalayas through Nepal and Bhutan to Burma) in the north that 'protect' the plains of Hindostan, several other geological and climatological events occurred that shaped the sub-continent of today. A 'lost continent', *Lemuria*, that probably existed between India and eastern Africa, sank below the Arabian Sea. The Chagos—Laccadive Plateau, the Carlsberg Ridge and the Seychelles—Mauritius Plateau in the Indian Ocean are orographic pointers to such a continent once existent. Our flora and fauna in the dry, semi-desert ecosystems in NW, SC and SE. India most resemble those of the Somaliland—Sudan area in NE. Africa. The Western Ghats are faulted by the subsidence of an earlier crest that lay more westward, probably where the Laccadives now exist. The Deccan Plateau experienced volcanic eruptions 70-50 million years ago, before *Dravidia* hit Asia, the lava flow resulting in the 'black cotton' soil now found in Kathiawar and west central India as well. The rise of the *Himalaya* initiated our monsoonal weather pattern that altered the climate of the sub-continent and began a drying phase. Some 10,000 years ago the last *glacial* age brought down temperatures here and increased humidity. During the ensuing *postglacial* or *interglacial* we are experiencing now, a drier period followed which perhaps explains the disjunct distribution of rain forest and their bird species like the Fairy Bluebird (1109), Large GREEN Shrike (1067), Great Pied Hornbill (776), Blue-bearded Bee-eater (753) and others. This is the history, geography, geology, climatology, botany and zoology of a region one must comprehend if he/she is to make any scientific sense of Natural History observations, which are then used to decipher the ecology, biogeography, phylogeny and evolution of any taxon. I hope I have created an awareness in those who call themselves bird watchers, about the length and breadth of knowledge they can experience with every bird species they recognize and wish to study. Understanding the life-styles of birds is a revelation into our own inadequacies and attitudes, as you will find out, in time.

E.M. Forster was "one of those rare authors whose books are kept and re-read, not only for their stories, but for the wise sayings which crowd their pages and the gentle humanist philosophy which they reveal." The second paragraph of his above quotation suggests another geological process now occurring on the northern "outposts" of Primal India. The section of the ancient Indian Plate north of the Tapti-Godavari rivers, which I propose to call *Gondwana* (Central Highlands), is now a transitional belt with what is a 'mixed' and impoverished flora and fauna. The Gangetic river basin is eroding the Vindhyas with "something of the sea's action," witness the crumbling ravines around the river Chambal near Gwalior, and others eastward through Bundelkhand, Kaimur Hills, Baghelkhand and the northern edges of the Chhota Nagpur Plateau. The prehistoric Vindhya and Satpura hill ranges are poorly known biogeographically, being repositories of complex geological and climatic influences. Both Teak *Tectona grandis* and Saal *Shorea robusta* jungles meet here, as do Grey Junglefowl (301) and Red Junglefowl (299), besides other Peninsular Indian and Sino-Himalayan taxa. However, there are a few bird species, for example, which appear to be peculiar to this region of antiquity and flux—Green Munia (1965), Brown Rock Chat (1692), Large Grey Babbler (1258), Marshall's Iora (1102), Sykes' Crested Lark (902), Forest Spotted Owlet (653), and perhaps the Lesser Florican (357) as well.

The Central Highlands, abutting on the Gangetic Plain, are rather inadequately surveyed for birds and smaller animals, and the latter zone is almost all cultivated, with little natural vegetation extant in pockets now. Salim Ali and Hugh Whistler's "The Birds of Central India" (1939-1940, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 41: 82-106, 470-488) and C.E. Hewetson's "Observations on the Bird Life of Madhya Pradesh" (1956, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 53: 595-645) are the only major papers on this State. Even the Butterflies of the Central Highlands are poorly known and researched, J.A. Betham recording 116 species from the "Central Provinces" (1890-1892, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 5: 19-28, 152-161, 279-286; 6: 175-183, 318-331, 423-429) at the end of the last century. J. Forsyth's (1872) The Highlands of Central India is a classic and J.L. Stewart & D. Brandis' (1874) The Forest Flora of North West and Central India is the only major work on the Botany of this area. The then Conservator of Forests, C.E. Hewetson (1951, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 50: 431-433), lamented the lack of a comprehensive Flora of Madhya Pradesh and the "central parts of the Indian Union," and made some suggestions advocating that preliminary work may have "to be carried out mostly by voluntary workers." G. Sen Gupta (1979, *Bull. Bot. Surv. India*, 19: 71-88) gave a resume of floristic studies in Madhya Pradesh.

This then is a brief round-up of major work done on the Birds, Butterflies and Botany of Gondwana, Bordering on what I would like to call Induganga, the recently formed Indo-Gangetic Plains which stretch from Sindh and Greater Punjab to Bihar and Greater Bengal (the erstwhile Presidency, including Bangladesh of today).

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1997. Notes, Abbreviations and Contributors are at the end.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills 07.12 (AP)
INDIAN PITTA 1 flew into house at 16:00 hrs. In good condition. Released.

Hussain Sagar 4.11 (ST)
LITTLE GREBE 200+; SPOTBILL DUCK 2; SHOVELLER 35 M, 265 F.; COOT 50+; GREEN SANDPIPER 2; COMMON SANDPIPER 6; BLACKWINGED STILT 52, including 8 sub-ad.; GREY WAGTAIL 1; WHITE WAGTAIL 4.

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park 22.11 (CTH)
STONE CURLEW; NIGHTJAR (sp?) on footpath (approached to within 2 m.!); (both birds late evening).

Madhapur, Jubilee Hills 02.12 (CTH)
(Tank along railroad tracks between Madhapur and Kukatpally)
LITTLE CORMORANT; PURPLE HERON; COOT 500+; COTTON TEAL; BLACK REDSTART.

Nandi Hills 07.12 (CTH)
(Between Dr Ambedkar University & old Bombay highway)
OPENBILL STORK 18.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru (CTH)
LARGE CORMORANT 02.11: ad., with imm.; PAINTED STORK 07.12: 18; OPENBILL STORK 30.10: 1; WHITENECKED STORK 07.12: 3; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 30.10; 02.11; 16.11; RUDDY SHELDUCK 16.11; PINTAIL 30.10: 11 eclipse plm.; 02.11: eclipse; 16.11; 07.12; COMMON TEAL 30.10: 32 in eclipse plm.. 02.11: eclipse; 07.12: SHOVELLER 30.10: 3 M in eclipse plm.; 02.11; 16.11; 07.12; COMMON POCHARD 30.10: 3; BLACKEARED KITE 07.12; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 16.11: imm.; PALE HARRIER 02.11: F; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 02.11: 1M; 07.12; MARSH HARRIER 07.12; REDHEADED MERLIN 16.11: pair; KESTREL 30.10; 02.11; 07.12; WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN 16.11. 07.12: 2; PURPLE MOORHEN 02.11: ad. with imm.; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER 07.12; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 02.11: 2; REDSHANK 02.11: 5; MARSH SANDPIPER 02.11: 1; GREEN SANDPIPER 30.10. 02.11; COMMON SANDPIPER 30.10; FANTAIL SNIPE 07.12; SNIPE (sp.?) 02.11; LITTLE STINT 02.11; RUFF 30.10; 02.11; 30+; 07.12; BLACKWINGED STILT 30.10: 5; 02.11: 18; 16.11; 07.12; RED TURTLE DOVE 16.11; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 02.11: 2; 16.11; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 30.10: 17+; 02.11; 16.11; 07.12; SWALLOW 02.11; CLIFF SWALLOW 02.11; STRIATED SWALLOW 02.11; BROWN SHRIKE 30.10; BLUETHROAT 16.11; F; COLLARED BUSHCHAT 30.10; 02.11; 16.11; 07.12; TREE PIPIT 16.11; YELLOWHEADED WAGTAIL 02.11; WHITE WAGTAIL 02.11; BAYA 30.10: M at N; RED MUNIA 30.10: M in br. plm carrying N-mat.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Shamirpet Lake 23.11 (AP)
GREY HERON 23; PAINTED STORK 1; BLACK IBIS 2; CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 1 mobbed by house crows; MONTAGU'S HARRI-ER 1 M; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1; KESTREL 1; REDHEADED MER-LIN 1 pair; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA *c.* 6 non-br. plm.; SYKES'S CRESTED LARK 1-2 flocks; BAYBACKED SHRIKE 1 bird carrying food in bill (larder?). ; ORPHEAN WARBLER 1; LESSER WHITE-THROAT 1; BLACK REDSTART 1; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 2; TAWNY PIPIT.

VISHAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

Kondakarla Lake 23.8-29.8 (JP)
WHITEBACKED VULTURE 12+; PURPLE MOORHEN 18+; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA None. In May '97 100s observed; KENTISH PLOVER 12+; REDSHANK 6; MARSH SANDPIPER 4; GREENSHANK 16; GREEN SANDPIPER 11+; SPOTTED SANDPIPER 5+; COMMON SANDPIPER 14+; DUNLIN 32+, 4 in summer plm.; CURLEW SANDPIPER 20+, 2 in summer plm.; WHISKERED TERN 10+, 8 in summer plm.; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 5; SWALLOW 8+, 6 juv.; BLACK DRONGO 25+, 14 in tail moult.

KARNATAKA

BELGAUM DISTRICT 10.2 From moving train window. (KG)
Londa (0750 hrs)
BLACK DRONGO on flowering *Butea* sp.; JUNGLE MYNA 20+ on flowering *Butea* sp.; BAYA on N; SCARLET ROSEFINCH 15+.
Kudachi (1145 hrs)
GOSHAWK soaring & then landing on *Acacia* sp., tree.
Shedbal (1205 hrs)
CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE over sugar fields.

MAHARASHTRA

AHMADNAGAR DISTRICT 24.2 From train window (KG)
Belapur (0940 hrs)
REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER on large peepul with many small figs near railway station.

KOLHAPUR DISTRICT 12.2 From car window (KG)
Kolhapur city (0740 hrs)
MARSH HARRIER 1M over weedy rivulet.

ABBREVIATIONS:
Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP), C Tom Hash (CTH), Jafer Palot (JP), Dr Kumar Ghorpadé (KG), Siraj Taher (ST).

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 81 : January 1998

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members should reach destination by themselves at 8.00 a.m. The trip will be for a half day. Please bring lunch, water, etc., as required. Please assemble near the bus-stop in the village, on the main road. Further details from Aasheesh Pittie at 3350683 between 7-9 p.m.

25-01-1998: Palmakole Tank, Palmakole village, Mahbubnagar District : 30 km from Hyderabad on the Bangalore NH 7.

NOTES & NEWS

RESEARCHERS FIND 'MYSTERY BIRD' UNSEEN FOR 113 YEARS

December 30, 1997

WASHINGTON (AP) -- An Indian "mystery bird" unseen for 113 years and suspected to be extinct has been photographed by American scientists, who also uncovered a bird-watchers scandal.

Pamela C. Rasmussen of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington said Tuesday that she and two colleagues sighted the Indian **Forest Owlet** in a wooded area near Shahada, India, northeast of Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay.

"The last definite report on this bird was when a specimen was collected in 1884," Rasmussen said. "I didn't really expect to find it. This is a once-in-a-lifetime thing."

The Forest Owlet, or Blewitt's Owl, is an 8-inch (20-centimeter) high bird with big eyes and outsized beak, feet and talons. It is brown with distinctive bands on its wings and underside. And it is one of the puzzles of the bird world.

"It is considered one of the mystery birds of India," Rasmussen said. The first recorded sighting of the owl was in the 1870s and over the next 12 years there were seven specimens collected and stuffed, she said. After that, no positive sightings were recorded for 113 years.

"There were four reports this century, but we found that each of these reports were erroneous or unconfirmed," she said.

One of the reports was downright phony, the Americans found.

A British bird collector, **Col. Richard Meinertzhagen**, claimed to have collected and stuffed a specimen in 1914. But after close analysis of the specimen, Rasmussen concluded that Meinertzhagen had made a false claim.

"He claimed to have collected it in one locality in 1914 when, in fact, it had been stolen from the British Museum," she said.

A close study showed that the bird was actually collected in the 1880s by a bird scientist who used a unique method of preserving specimens.

(Copyright 1997 The Associated Press.)

"In response to several requests for information, I'd like to state that I have forwarded details of the exact locality and habitat in which we found the **Forest Owlet** to Dr. Rahmani at the BNHS, and the Deputy Director of the North Dhule Forest Division, Mr. M. Pokyim, was immediately advised of the site and apparent rarity of the bird. It seems appropriate for the time being, until something is known of its status, for requests for further directions to go to them. The site is easily accessible by road from Shahada but if you are planning to go please do contact the local forest office first. These birds are confiding and could easily be disturbed. If anyone obtains a tape of their calls, please use the utmost discretion. Because they are apparently highly diurnal there should be no need to use tapes anyway.

"As for identification, it is much more straightforward than might be expected. In general appearance it could be said to look more like a *Glaucidium* than a Spotted Owlet, and osteologically it resembles the former more than the latter as well. It has very short, massive, heavily-feathered legs, with big white-feathered toes and very large claws. The crown and mantle appear unspotted cold grey-brown at a distance, but on a close view small white speckles are visible. The face has a pallid appearance, lacking the prominent dark cheek patches of the Spotted Owlet. The frontal collar is not particularly helpful, but the near lack of a white-spotted hind collar is striking; only when the head is raised can any indication of this be seen. The pattern of the underparts is particularly distinctive: the breast looks solid dull brown, and the flanks broadly barred with broken bands, while the rest of the underparts, including the center of the lower breast, the lower flanks, legs and toes, and vent, are immaculate white. The feathers of the lower underparts are fluffy and sitting in the sun the bird can look largely white below. The wings and tail are broadly banded blackish brown and white, with the white bands nearly the width of the dark bands. On the fresh-plumaged bird we saw the tail tip had a broad white band, while the worn bird had this nearly worn off. The former showed striking contrast between the dullish mantle and the prominently banded wings and tail. In flight, both birds also showed a striking amount of white below and banded wings.

"With a decent view there should be no confusion. There is a lot to be learned about its status, range, habitat, habits, and vocalizations, and certainly responsible birders can play a major role in this."

From: Pam Rasmussen <MNHVZ102@sivm.si.edu>
To: Natural History of South Asia - General discussion and research <nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU>

Some members of the Society visited the campus of the **A.P. Police Academy** at Himayat Sagar on 30-11-1997, at the invitation of its Director, Mr Krishna Rao and Jt Director, Mr S A Huda, both of whom are enthusiastic environmentalists. The campus covers an area of *c.* 180 acres of which *c.* 50 acres have not been developed at all. A wall enclosing this entire block of land was constructed in 1987. The habitat is mostly broken rocky country with red laterite (*marram*) soil and dry scrub. There are hardly any large trees, but considerable planting of various tree species has been done around the structures and roads. We recommended that the path through the wilderness area not be black-topped as birds would be using it for various activities. The director showed keenness towards this idea. 39 species of birds were identified during the short walk through the campus. These included 2 Blue Rock Thrush and a Kestrel near the main buildings. A male blue rock thrush was singing from atop the building, which seemed surprising. Perhaps it was a sub-song? 3 species of harriers (Marsh, Pale, Montagu's), an unidentified *Aquila* sp., rufous-bellied and yellow-eyed babblers were some other highlights. After a sumptuous breakfast, Mr Krishna Rao announced that the Academy had become a Corporate Member of the Society! Members felt that the Academy campus could become a wonderful area for minor wildlife if the protection given it now continues.

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12 members and 7 guests attended the field trip to **Ibrahimpatnam Tank** (Rangareddi District) on 21-12-1997. The early morning fog cleared gradually by 8 a.m. while members assembled on the bund. A team from E-TV was also present and interviewed some members for their evening news! Initially birding was dull as not many birds could be sighted from where we stood, but soon a large flock of 70 Openbill Storks on the opposite shore of the tank raised everyone's spirits. A raft of Redcrested Pochards, Pintail, Common Teal, etc., in the middle of the still waters held our attention for a while. Later, members walked along the western margin of the tank where a large darkish Short-toed Eagle was seen. Also observed were Sykes's Crested Larks and a male Hen Harrier. In all 21 species were listed for the area. The total count of waterfowl was *c.* 600 birds on the water and along the margins of the tank.

While returning, we stopped at a small marsh known as **Masab Cheruvu**, where 5 Painted Storks probed the waters in unison and a flotilla of Shovellers, Pintails and Common Teal sifted water along with 11 Ruddy Shelduck. A tight flock of Marsh Sandpipers had a sprinkling of hunch-backed Ruff of which one was white-headed!

The **Pitohui**, also known as the garbage bird, is the only known member of the bird family that is poisonous. The Pitohui lives in the rainforests of **Papua New Guinea**. These brightly colored birds contain homobatrachtoxin a neurotoxin in the feathers, skin and flesh. Yes, that's right....a poisonous bird. The structure and function of this toxin is similar to the South American tree frog poison, batrachtoxin, that has been used as an arrow poison. Both of these toxins affect the function of sodium ion channels in excitable membranes (nervous or muscular tissue).

WHEN A BIRD IN THE HAND IS WORSE THAN TWO IN THE BUSH

When J. Dumbacher, an ornithologist working in Papua New Guinea, scratched his hand while freeing a hooded pitohui from a collecting net, his first instinct was to suck the wound. This was a bad move, for he immediately experienced a numbing and burning in his mouth. The reason for this, it turned out, was because the skin and feathers of pitohuis are loaded with homobatrachotoxin, a type of poison. This discovery makes the pitohuis the first known poisonous birds. Like many other poisonous animals, the pitohuis also emit a foul odor and advertise their unsavory nature with bright colors.

Homobatrachotoxin possesses a rather complex chemical structure. One wonders how the pitohuis acquired the ability to synthesize it through random mutations.

The puzzle deepens when one discovers that homobatrachotoxin is also manufactured by the New World poison-dart frogs. Although far-separated taxonomically, both species traveled along the same path of random mutations to achieve this evolutionary convergence.

(BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU)

In ***Pitta* # 80** (December 1997), p. 1, there is an error in the Corporate Membership fees. Please read Rs. 2,000/- for 20 years (compounded) instead of Rs. 5,000/- for the same period. Another error which cropped up inadvertently was when the automatic replace facility of the word-processor was used to replace 'Wood' with 'Green'. Due to oversight, this change occurred through the entire document, instead of a few words. However, Green Sandpiper, where ever mentioned, is *Tringa ochropus*. Thanks to Krys Kazmierczak for pointing out these mistakes!

If you think identifying birds by their songs is tough...

A college student needed a small two-hour course to fill out his schedule. The only one available was Wildlife Biology. After one week the professor gave the class a test. He passed out a sheet of paper divided into squares. In each square was a carefully drawn picture of some bird legs. No bodies, no feet, just legs. The test asked each student to identify the birds from their legs.

The student sat and stared at the test and got more and more angry. Finally he stomped up to the front of the classroom and threw the test on the teacher's desk. "This is the stupidest test I have ever taken."

The teacher looked up and said, "Young man, you have flunked this test. What is your name?"

The student pulled up his pant-legs and showed the professor his legs and replied, "You tell me!"

------Andy Rabin, Gaithersburg, MD, andyrab@wam.umd.edu

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—12

"Techniques such as gel electrophoresis, immunodiffusion, protein sequencing,—and DNA hybridization have become powerful means to study biological evolution. Indeed, the last 10 years have witnessed the blossoming of a new field of study whose subject is evolution at the macromolecular level. This new biological discipline might be called 'Molecular Evolution'." (F.J. Ayala, *Molecular Evolution*, 1976: vii).

"The study of [molecular evolution] requires special techniques, including those named by Ayala, and the significance of some of the findings is still doubtful." (P.J. Darlington Jr, *Evolution for Naturalists: The Simple Principles and Complex Reality*, 1980 : 81).

"Biochemical techniques are not the panacea for phylogenetic reconstruction. But they do provide useful data which may be incorporated into phylogenetic studies when it is realized that the data may be analyzed in the same manner as other sorts of phylogenetic data. The old adage 'the closer to the gene the closer to the truth' simply does not wash (Throckmorton, 1978)." (E.O. Wiley, *Phylogenetics: The Theory and Practice of Phylogenetic Systematics*, 1981 : 339).

Ahai! Beware, the bird watcher sleuths are coming.....with DNA 'fingerprints'! This 'essay' of mine is actually AN OPEN LETTER TO THE EDITORS of *Pitta*, *a la* Whistler. I do not know if any of you have read, or are even aware of, Hugh Whistler's Open Letter (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 35: 189-195) written on 23rd January 1931 from his home at Caldbec House, Battle, Sussex, England, to the then editors of this Journal—P.M.D. Sanderson, S.H. Prater and C. McCann. I believe Indian Ornithology is now faced with a 'danger' similar to the "indiscriminate use of subspecific or racial names" referred to by Whistler then. We bird watchers here, "working in a land far from the centres of scientific thought" (true even six decades after Whistler's Letter was published!) are now waking up "like Rip Van Winkle" to a new nomenclature and phylogeny of our bird taxa, initiated through the treatise written by C.G. Sibley & B.L. Monroe Jr (1990, 1993) on the *Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World*, based on Sibley, Monroe and J.E. Ahlquist's (1988, 1990) thesis on the *Phylogeny and Classification of the Birds of the World*, using DNA-DNA hybridization, which is a biochemical technique, utilized for **quantitative** [accent mine—KG] character analysis of, in this case, the Class Aves and its lower taxa.

Whistler's "constant guide, companion and friend," his "bible", was the now century-old 4-Volume *OLD FAUNA* (1889, 1890, 1895, 1898) by E.W. Oates & W.T. Blanford, which he relied on soon after he "arrived in India and started to work on Indian Birds" in December 1909, while in the employment of the Indian (Imperial) Police in Greater Punjab (including most of what is now Himachal Pradesh). He wrote of his "own struggles against this clumsy unsatisfactory new system of trinomials, new to [him] at a time when science in Europe had entirely accepted it," and about how he "accepted it at last and painfully annotated [his] *Fauna* with the aid of Hartert's great work, endeavouring to reconcile the old and the new." At that time, when almost all Indian bird watchers were Europeans (mainly British or Irish) who still used the *OLD FAUNA*, and when Salim Ali was entering his teens and beginning to enjoy bird watching, Ernst Hartert's 3-Volume *Die Vogel der palaarktischen Fauna* (1910-1922, Supplement 1938) was introducing trinomial nomenclature (subspecies), to scientists in Europe. This work turned Oates & Blanford's binomial (species) classification "archaic" and led to a fellow Indian Police officer, E.C. Stuart Baker, compiling a 8-Volume second edition of the *Fauna*, using subspecies names in what became known as the *NEW FAUNA* (1922, 1924, 1926-1930). By then Whistler had left India for England on leave, pending retirement, in April 1926, in which year Salim Ali published his first note (*J.B.N.H.S.*, 31:524-526), with comments by Whistler and C.H.Donald. Whistler was working there with Claud B. Ticehurst on a "Handbook of Indian Birds," besides helping Salim Ali also with his bird surveys of our erstwhile Princely States.

When he wrote his Open Letter, Whistler, with his British Museum colleague Norman B. Kinnear, was "working out" the Eastern Ghats Bird Survey collections (some 1550 specimens—skins—shot by B.N.H.S.' V.S. LaPersonne, in the present States of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, from 8th April 1929 to 15th May 1930) and beginning to grapple with the subspecies concept, experiencing "endless trouble". This was because at that time, "with the exception of Sind, the Punjab, the Himalayas and the Bombay Presidency," no other part of British India had any significant additions made to the seminal A.O. Hume Collection. Incidentally, Whistler & Kinnear's "series of papers were practically a review of the birds of the peninsula" (*vide* Kinnear, 1943, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 44: 289) and this Eastern Ghats survey report (17 parts, 311 pp. long, in *J.B.N.H.S.*, Vols 34-39, 1930, 1932-1937) is indispensable to any serious bird watcher of "S. India" even today.

Like Whistler and his contemporaries were used to the *OLD FAUNA* and "accepted its dicta with complete and justified confidence," we ourselves have been conditioned to the trinomial nomenclature (and English names) summarized by S.D. Ripley II in the *OLD* and *NEW SYNOPSIS* (1961, 1982) and later used by Salim Ali and Ripley in their 10-Volume *INDIAN* (or *COMPACT*) *HANDBOOK* (1968-1974, 1987). With T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996, x+ 294 pp., map, 904 refs, 2586 spp., 8 "excluded"), published by the Oriental Bird Club, are we also now awakening from our slumber to perhaps find "that the world had passed us by"? Luckily, the *NOMENCLATURE REVIEW* booklet "presented" by Aasheesh Pittie & Andrew Robertson (1993, viii+106 pp., 8 refs, 1292 spp.) summarized, usefully, the changes in scientific and English names of bird species occurring in the Indian subcontinent (minus Burma). I have, not "painfully" but painlessly, annotated my copy of the *NEW SYNOPSIS* with these nomenclatural changes (scientific names only) , but will require a few more months to study, check, and comprehend the innovations and alterations in the *ANNOTATED CHECKLIST* of Inskipp *et al*. A detailed review of this book will appear shortly in a future number of my *HUMEA: Field Ornithology*, but I wish to briefly discuss the *basics* of these changes here and now.

I am a taxonomist trained, by choice (!), over the past 25 years in India and the U.S.A., with brief sojourns at the incomparable "temple of biodiversity research and collections"—The Natural History Museum in London. Taxonomy is a highly specialized branch of Science, besides being absolutely *basic*, but is hardly comprehensible, if not bewildering, to self-taught naturalists (Salim Ali never pretended any mastery over taxonomy and therefore relied on Whistler and then Ripley, if not Biswamoy Biswas and Humayun Abdulali too, for necessary help), who make up the vast majority of bird watchers nowadays, as always.

There are at least *two* (if not three) important questions that arise out of the current update and modifications suggested by the above mentioned contemporary workers. The most significant are the alterations in the species names and the re-assignment of some species to different genera. The *ANNOTATED CHECKLIST* apparently deals fairly adequately with these matters, even if "based almost entirely on a review of the literature" (see p.2). Witness the example of the Grey Shrike (#933-936) in our sub-continent, which must now be called *Lanius meridionalis* Temminck and not *L. excubitor* Linnaeus which latter is perhaps recorded here only thrice, as a vagrant of the subspecies *homeyeri* Cabanis (936)? Reference to the *WORLD CHECKLIST* by R. Howard & A. Moore (1984: 380) tells me that *meridionalis* was applied to the population of *excubitor* (or *elegans* Swainson?) inhabiting southern France and the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal). This decision,

to recognize *meridionalis* as distinct from *excubitor*, is apparently based on their parapatric (i.e., contiguous allopatric as against disjunct allopatric, *vide* Wiley, 1981: 59) distribution there and "absence of hybridization, coupled with morphological, behavioural and ecological differences" (Inskipp *et al.*, 1996: 117). It is these decisions in the *ANNOTATED* ("OBC") *CHECKLIST* which are interesting, but possibly need be confirmed by taxonomic specialists before we adopt them, unquestionably.

After Stuart Baker, Whistler, Kinnear and Ticehurst, only Biswas (see *Rec. Indian Mus.*, 50: 1-62, 54: 101-106; 1952 & 1956) perhaps understood our bird species taxonomy, if not Abdulali also, before Ripley bestowed upon us what was "more than merely an up-to-date checklist", the *OLD SYNOPSIS* (1961; which I had bought in September 1965 for what is now a meagre sum of Rs 25!), which was "calculated to provide the greatest measure of stability" and, in Whistler's words describing Oates & Blanford's *Fauna*, "the millenium of all good Ornithologists—uniformity of Nomenclature." However, I believe that finality in the classification of our avifauna is still distant and elusive, requiring several detailed revisions (in taxonomic terminology) of all the distinctly polytypic (2 or more 'subspecies') species occurring here. Unless there is more adequate taxonomic work done on species breeding in or visiting our region, I would prefer to go on using Ripley's nomenclature, with specific cross-references to species names (and numbers) in the *ANNOTATED CHECKLIST*, for information and update. Rushing blindly (and in ignorant obedience?) into 'accepting' this new 'standard' may just be suspiciously premature. Compare what has happened to the trinomial nomenclature of Hartert through Baker to Ripley in this Century—splitting has given way again to careful 'lumping', or, more correctly, to looking at similarities rather than differences, at the biologically unique *species* level. Notice again the generic placement of the Pied Crested Cuckoo (570) species *jacobinus* Boddaert, 1783 – from *Cuculus* to *Coccystes* to *Clamator* to *Oxylophus* and now back to *Clamator*! In July 1980, Dr Chris Thompson of the U.S.D.A. Systematic Entomology Laboratory at the U.S. National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. (who was later to interact with me as my advisor during my post-doctoral tenure at the Smithsonian Institution, in 1982-1983) commented in a letter to me that "The genus in Ornithology has lost its importance as a vehicle which groups species for ease of identification and information retrieval." How true this statement is even today, though efforts are now on to correct the situation. So, *caution* over imprudence and indiscretion is recommended with regard to just DNA-based changes in scientific, 'Latin', names for our birds. (*to be continued....*)

Dr Kumar Ghorpade

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Notes, Abbreviations and Contributors are at the end.

ANDHRA PRADESH

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Ibrahimpatnam Tank 21.12.1997 (AP)
PAINTED STORK 1; OPENBILL STORK 70; RUDDY SHELDUCK 9; PINTAIL 20; COMMON TEAL 38; REDCRESTED POCHARD 40; HEN-HARRIER 1 M; PALE HARRIER 1 M; MARSH HARRIER 1; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1 dark phase; SYKES'S CRESTED LARK 3-4.

Masab Cheruvu 21.12.1997 (AP)
PAINTED STORK 5; RUDDY SHELDUCK 11; RUFF Several, 1 with white head; BLACKWINGED STILT 23.

Khanamet Tank 28.12.1997 (SAK)
PURPLE MOORHEN Absent; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA non-br., plm.

Miapur Tank 28.12.1997 (SAK)
RUDDY SHELDUCK 7; COMMON TEAL 25; SPOTBILL DUCK 15; GADWAL 20; WIGEON 12; SHOVELLER 5.

KERALA

ERNAKULAM DISTRICT (CVA)

Alangad 19-20.11.1997
STONE CURLEW.

North Parur
GREY WAGTAIL 12-13.9.1997 often; GOLDEN ORIOLE 10-12.11.1997 non-br., local migrant; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 15.11.1997 non-br., local migrant.

MAHARASHTRA

AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICT 27.11.1997 (SK)

Pimpalgaon Reservoir
LITTLE GREBE 200+; WHITENECKED STORK 2; SPOONBILL 1; FLAMINGO 28; COOT 100+; BLACKWINGED STILT 11.

TAMIL NADU

CHENNAI DISTRICT (VS)

Guindy National Park, Chennai 9.11.1997
BOOTED EAGLE 3 including a light-phase bird; KOEL F C on every 2nd tree. M scarce. Local movement along SE coast. CRIMSONBREASTED BARBET 13 on one tree, another had 5+; PITTA 2-3 hrd, 1 seen; ASHY MINIVET 1 F; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 2 of which 1 ad M; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER 1 hrd 2-3; LESSER WHITETHROAT 1.

ABBREVIATIONS:
Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP), C V Aneesh (CVA), S Ashok Kumar (SAK), Dr Sudhakar Kurhade (SK).

REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh (Aasheesh Pittie); Kerala (P O Nameer); Tamil Nadu (V Santharam).

Let us resolve to introduce at least 2 new people to birdwatching this year! !! HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL !!

For Private Circulation Only

For more information write to: Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh, P.O. Box 45, Banjara Hills Post Office, Hyderabad 500034. India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher. **Membership** (Rs): Admission=10; Ordinary=35; Student=15 per annum; Life=500. **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 82 : February 1998

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Members should reach destination by themselves at 8.00 a.m. The trip will be for a full day. Lunch will be available in the canteen on payment basis. Please bring water, etc., as required. Please assemble at the main gate. Further details from Siraj Taher at 3352607 between 7-9 p.m.

01-03-1998: ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru, Medak District : 30 km from Hyderabad on the Mumbai NH 9.

NOTES & NEWS

ETHICS FOR BIRDERS

1. **Put the welfare of the bird first.**

a. Do nothing that would flush a bird from its nest or keep it from its eggs or young.

b. Avoid chasing or repeatedly flushing any bird; in particular, do not force a tired migrant or a bird in cold weather to use up energy in flight.

c. Do not handle birds or their eggs unless you have a permit to do so.

d. Make a special effort to avoid or stop the harassment of any bird whose presence in the area has been publicized among birders. This stricture especially applies to the use of tapes and to the disturbance of nesting birds, and of vagrants and rare, threatened, and endangered species.

e. If you think a bird's welfare will be threatened if its presence is publicized, document it carefully and report its presence only to someone who needs to have the information (e.g., a refuge manager, an officer of the appropriate records committee, the editor of the appropriate journal). If you are not sure, discuss it with the manager of a rare bird alert or another experienced and responsible birder.

2. **Protect habitat.**

a. Stay on existing roads and trails whenever possible.

b. Leave vegetation as you find it; do not break it or remove it to get a better view, or trample marshland into mud.

3. **Respect the rights of others.**

a. Do not trespass on property that may be private, whether or not "No Trespassing" signs have been posted. Ask the landowner directly for access unless specific permission for birders to enter the area has been announced or published.

b. Do not enter closed areas of public lands without permission.

c. If you find a rare bird on land that is closed to the public, do not publicize it without describing the possible consequences of doing so to the owner and obtaining appropriate permission.

d. Stay out of plowed or planted fields and managed turf or sod.

e. By behaving responsibly and courteously to nonbirders at rywhere. Do nothing that may have the consequence of excluding future birders from an area.

f. When seeking birding information from others call only between 9 a.m and 9 p.m. unless you know that your call will be welcome at that number at other hours.

[This section is excerpted from Claudia Wilds's book *Finding Birds in the National Capital Area* (Smithsonian, 1992; available from the American Birding Association)].

WELLINGTON, Dec. 31 (Reuters) - The bird that symbolises **New Zealand** around the world—the **North Island brown kiwi**—is headed for extinction, perhaps in 15 years, a scientist said on Wednesday.

In the past 15 years numbers of gawky the, flightless birds with their distinctive long, rapier beaks, have plummeted from about 70,000 to 30,000.

Landcare Research scientist John McLennan said the North Island brown kiwi was most threatened by predators, habitat loss and insufficient funding to ensure its survival, despite the efforts of the Department of Conservation and recovery programmes.

The future is slightly brighter for other kiwi species. The populations of the great spotted kiwi and the southern brown kiwi are thought to be stable, although their ranges have diminished.

The little spotted kiwi population is thought to number about 1,500 birds and is growing, thanks to island sanctuaries.

Stoats headed the list of predators, killing chicks within a month of their leaving the nest. Ferrets were beginning to affect remaining pockets of kiwi in Northland in the north of the country.

McLennan, who has studied kiwis for 15 years, said Northland kiwi were being killed off at about the same rate as kiwi in the lower North Island but because there were more of them their decline would be slower.

There were more than 30,000 birds in the North Island, two thirds of them in Northland with a couple of thousand on Little Barrier Island near Auckland and fewer than 100 on the other main sanctuary, Kapiti Island near Wellington.

"It still may take them more than 15 summers to get to extinction but extinction probably occurs before every one is gone. Once you get down to a density of perhaps one per 10 sq km (four square miles) then it may be all over even though there are still a few individuals hanging around," he said.

"We can debate when they are going to reach that point. There is absolutely no debate that they are going to get there unless they are helped."

Only about five percent of chicks reached adulthood. Scientists believed 20 percent needed to survive for kiwi populations to stabilize.

A short-term solution would be to control stoats for the two months of the year which coincide with kiwi hatchings but the work would have to be done on a large scale.

"We know what we have to do. The reason we are not doing particularly well is because literally there aren't the resources ... it's money. The expertise exists," McLennan said.

Stoats were deliberately imported into New Zealand to control the rabbit population.
(BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU)

The **address label** on your *Pitta* / *Mayura* mailing envelope indicates your membership/mailing status and the due date for your membership renewal e.g.,

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31-3-1998 → Membership renewal date.

Membership/mailing status abbreviations are: OR=ordinary; LI=life; ST=student; CO=complimentary; CR=corporate.

BERHAMPUR (ORISSA), Jan 21 (PTI): Ornithologists are excited over the sighting of some rare migratory birds this winter in the **Chilka Lake**, one of the country's largest waterfowl habitat. Birds like the **Baikal Teal**, and Tawny Eagle, among others, had been sighted in the Nalaban area, according to the divisional forest officer, Chilka Wildlife Division, Mr Laxmikanta Dash. Baikal Teal, the resident bird of lake Baikal, was found in the Nalaban for the first time this year, he said and expressed hope that more new species might be spotted in Chilka during the upcoming bird survey. About two million birds had arrived in the lake since October 18 last. The influx, which continued till the second week of January, was expected to end now and the winged visitors would start leaving at the first hint of summer towards the end of February or early March.

The 15.5 sq km Nalaban island, declared a bird-sanctuary by the government, attracted about 60 % of all birds found in the 1,100 sq km brackish water lagoon, he said. Interestingly, a large number of flamingos and pelicans, who came to Chilka to avoid the chilling winter of their native places, had chosen to stay back in the lake for the last few years. Experts have been studying the behaviour of these birds as to why they chose to become residents of Chilka. The flamingos and pelicans usually come from Siberia, Afghanistan, Iran, Tibet, the Caspian Sea and the Himalayas after traversing thousands of kilometers.
[Deccan Herald Jan 22, 1998 (PTI)]. (Editors' Note: Please note that newspaper reports may often not be 100% factually accurate.)

Palmakole Tank was visited by members of the Society on 25-1-1998. The water level was extremely low as Large Egrets *Casmerodius albus* were seen wading almost in the middle of the lake! The entire land around the water is completely grazed. Though 39 species of birds were seen, waterfowl were almost non-existent. Just 2 Pintail *Anas acuta*, 5 Wigeon *A. penelope* and 5 Brahminy Duck *Tadorna ferruginea*! Of some solace was the sighting of 108 Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala*, standing on the foreshore in a loose flock and 19 Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*, all busy feeding in the water. Is their presence an indication of reducing water levels? One each of Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* and Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* were also seen.

UP FROM THE EGG: THE CONFESSIONS OF A NUTHATCH AVOIDER
by **Ogden Nash**
(from his *You Can't Get There from Here* 1957 pp. 115-6)

Bird watchers top my honors list.
I aimed to be one, but I missed.
Since I'm both myopic and astigmatic,
My aim turned out to be erratic,
And I, bespectacled and binocular,
Exposed myself to comment jocular.
We don't need too much birdlore, do we, To tell a flamingo from a towhee;
Yet I cannot, and never will,
Unless the silly birds stand still.
And there's no enlightenment in a tour
Of ornithological literature.
Is yon strange creature a common chickadee, Or a migrant alouette from Picardy?
You can rush to consult your Nature guide
And inspect the gallery inside,
But a bird in the open never looks
Like its picture in the birdie books-
Or if it once did, it has changed its plumage, And plunges you back into ignorant gloomage.
That is why I sit here growing old by inches,
Watching a clock instead of finches,
But I sometimes visualize in my gin
The Audubon that I audubin.

(Contributed to: BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU by Andy Rabin Gaithersburg, MD <andyrab@wam.umd.edu>)

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—13

"Arguments are presented against use of common names by lepidopterists. Common names: 1) are not universal; 2) neither serve as succinct labels nor clearly define relationships; 3) are language specific, and therefore hinder communication among scientists; and 4) often have been concocted, mainly at publishers' requests, on the assumption that laypersons cannot learn latinized names. Thus common names are also inherently insulting." (D.D. Murphy & P.R. Ehrlich, 1983, Crows, bobs, tits, elfs and pixies: The phoney "common name" phenomenon. *J.Res.Lepid.*, 22: 154-158 ... Abstract)

"Generally speaking, English in India is a second language and I question whether learning such a list of names in a foreign language is really much less difficult than learning a list of scientific names, despite many advocates of such common names; I cannot help feeling that it is better to take one bite at the cherry instead of two." (D.G.Sevastopulo, 1986, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 82: 683-684)

(....continued from *Pitta* # 81, January 1998, p. 4)

The second question relates to the suggested changes in the English names of our bird species. This is a matter that disturbs me a great deal, because any modification of long familiar, historical, English names is going to, in my view unnecessarily, create needless confusion and frustration among our bird fanciers (*a la* Hume), the non-serious bird watchers. Why is a "commissioning" of the preparation of a "standardized list of English names for birds of the world", by the International Ornithological Congress, so important to every bird watcher? And why do we, in South Asia, have to accept what are blatantly "North American" names like Loon for Diver, *etc.*, or unfamiliar ones like Avadavat or Parrotfinch for Munia, Flameback for Golden-backed Woodpecker, Leaf Bird for Chloropsis, Leaf Warbler for Willow Warbler, Prinia for Wren-Warbler, Cisticola for Fan-tailed Warbler, Grassbird for Grass Warbler, Canary Flycatcher for Grey-headed Flycatcher, Monarch for Black-naped Monarch Flycatcher, Fantail for Fantail Flycatcher, Thick-knee for Stone Curlew or Stone Plover, Francolin for Partridge, Needletail for Spine-tailed Swift, Dollarbird for Broad-billed Roller, Buttonquail for Bustard-Quail, Woodswallow for Swallow-Shrike, Petronia for Yellow-throated Sparrow, Groundpecker for Ground Chough, Hanging Parrot for Lorikeet, Cotton Pygmy-goose for Cotton Teal, Whistling-duck for Whistling Teal, Scrubfowl for Megapode, and so on? The other 'mischievous adjustments' are in regard to hyphens and word spaces, inserted or deleted from established use, *e.g.*, Cuckoo-Shrike, Paradise-Flycatcher or Laughingthrush and Tree-creeper. However, in some cases, Brahminy Starling is an improvement over Brahminy Myna, just as Sirkeer Malkoha is over Sirkeer Cuckoo—in these cases the nouns are correctly changed in keeping with generic affinity.

English (not 'common', for Science's sake!) names have a history behind their coinage and long use in different regions of the world. Retaining an overwhelming semblance of these regional ('colloquial'!) names helps in continuity and familiarity to the non-specialist. It would be a shame if change for the sake of change (or for multinational 'uniformity') is introduced through force by a foreign bird watching community, based in temperate regions with a different avifaunal heritage, to bear upon native birders in the much more biodiverse tropics. Scientific names were invented by Carl von Linné in the middle of the 18th Century, precisely to introduce a global language for scientists (and others) to understand references to species talked or written about anywhere in the world. If uniformity or standardization of bird names is needed, scientific nomenclature has already been doing this over the past 2 ½ centuries or so. Why then do we need an "authorized, official" World List of *English* names? "Recommended" English names (*e.g.*, like those suggested by the Royal Australian Ornithologists' Union in 1978) would be a far better approach.

Where people use languages other than English for their bird species, their local tongue nomenclature will carry on being used merrily, so why this painful transition for those of us who have learnt to use English? In my humble and considered opinion, English or other native language names must be left to users in their own areas to continue with the 'tradition'. And instead of wasting time and money over this "Standardized List of English Names", wouldn't it be better and more valuable to spend these on funding genuine, trained taxonomists to complete badly needed revisions of bird taxa (especially difficult genera) and help scientists prepare a near perfect classification, and scientific nomenclature, of the world of birds? I really believe we are wasting time fussing over changes in English names when ornithologists worth their salt should be investigating and confirming bird taxonomy and phylogeny.

Taxonomy and the persons who purvey this 'skilled art' are sadly underrated nowadays, when molecular biology and biochemistry 'rule the roost'. If we have an unreliable and faulty classification of the organisms we work with at any level, don't we realize that we are bound to be handicapped and disoriented? Instead of concentrating on vital aspects, we are 'ganging up', internationally (!), and wasting energy on trivial matters.

Ornithology, the science of birds, has unfortunately suffered over exposure at the hands of non-specialists, the *scientifically* un-trained bird watchers or 'popular media influenced public', for too long a time now, 'insidiously and surreptitiously' swayed by well-illustrated, 'easy to use' field guides and costly 'coffee table' books. Well endowed persons among them should rather come to the aid of committed, serious, ornithologists trained to do the job badly required now, like Loke Wan Tho happened to be introduced to Salim Ali by J.T.M. Gibson and what transpired then 'became history', as they say. The Oriental Bird Club's *ANNOTATED CHECKLIST* owes its 'existence' to Lady Y. Peng McNeice and the Loke Wan Tho Memorial Foundation, which is a fine example of what I am hinting at.

Like I mentioned at the beginning of this OPEN LETTER last month, bird writings in the Indian region, to quote Whistler, "are face to face with a danger which has arisen in most countries [?] but at the moment is particularly evident in India. I refer to the indiscriminate use of " English (or 'common') names. The recent paper by Daniels & Ravikumar (1997, *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, 37: 80-82) clearly exemplifies my point of concern. Their "common name" column uses these 'new' names of Inskipp *et al.* (1996) but, thankfully, gives the pertinent "HANDBOOK NO." against each. Calling our Jungle Crow "Largebilled" or the Little Brown Dove a "Laughing" one is unfortunate. A section of the "ornithological public in India" is proceeding to treat these *new names* as they treated the old ones. This tendency needs to be stopped at once and I hope most of you agree. The *SYNOPSIS* numbers are *vital* guides to names and data available in reference works like the *INDIAN HANDBOOK* (Salim Ali, 1996, *Book of Indian Birds*, 12th rev. edn), and *INDIAN (COMPACT) HANDBOOK, PICTORIAL GUIDE, NOMENCLATURE REVIEW*. Only the *scientific name* is 'universal' and must be constantly updated to more correct binomens, as taxonomic research dictates, from time to time. 'Standard English Names' are an impractical dream, best forgotten. But, the 'Standard Numbers' method, being used here from Jerdon to Hume to Oates & Blanford to Stuart Baker and to Ripley through Pittie & Robertson, is a blessing in quick, easy referral, in continuity, order and comprehensible sanity. Let's not forsake this convenience only to embrace a currently 'fashionable' change.

By the way, "The English names of the species included in the checklist are **not** [accent mine—KG] proposed as names that should be adopted on a worldwide basis" (see Inskipp *et al.*, 1996: 7). So, relax you native bird watchers and continue with Ripley's *NEW SYNOPSIS* and Salim Ali & Ripley's *COMPACT HANDBOOK* for the time being. Readers may also want to refer to my article which appeared in the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* [14(9): 6-9; 1974] where I dealt with "Brevity in Bird Names and the Subspecies problem". My final advice to bird watchers anywhere is this: Scientific names are really not all that difficult to get used to and master familiarity with—it just needs you to practice

learning them through *constant use*, which, believe me, will make you swell with pride and enable you to tackle serious ornithological literature with confidence. This is exactly what I myself learnt to do, with help from my first 'primer' in Ornithology—G.M. Henry's *A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon* (1955). Henry wrote (p. xiii) that "scientific names are often a stumbling-block to those who lack scientific training," but then went on to offer some remarks which he felt "may help throw light on what is really a very simple matter." "A little practice," he suggested (p. xv), "in the art of —shall we say 'intuition'—generally enables one to discover the identity of a bird in literature in spite of its numerous scientific aliases." Hence, bird watcher colleagues, it is these *scientific names*, now more easily accessible through Ripley (1982) and updated in Inskipp *et al.* (1996), that are the real *keys* to databases and unequivocal, global communication.

(to be continued...)

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Notes, Abbreviations and Contributors are at the end. Regional Referees: *Andhra Pradesh* - Aasheesh Pittie; *Karnataka* - J N Prasad; *Kerala* - P O Nameer; *Tamil Nadu* - V Santharam.

It is 8 months since this column began. The response has been fairly good, especially with strong backup from Dr V. Santharam from Chennai. By now readers have a good idea of the type of material we wish to publish. We give below a more detailed list to remove ambiguities. Of utmost importance is accuracy of identification and observations. Readers' responses and suggestions are welcome.

A **Migration:** Arrival and departure dates of migrant species. This is to know the migratory pattern of birds. All migratory species candidates for this data.

B **Breeding:** Besides distribution, breeding records of our birds are scarce and need documenting. All species are candidates here too. Contributors will have to send brief notes so that the breeding records may be placed under one of the following 3 sub-headings.

1 ***Possible Breeding:***

a Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat.

b Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season.

2 ***Probable Breeding:***

a Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.

b Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song, etc.) on at least two different days a week or more apart at same place.

c Courtship and display.

d Visiting probable nest-site.

e Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults.

f Brood patch on adult examined in the hand.

g Nest-building or excavating of nest-hole.

3 ***Confirmed Breeding:***

a Distraction-display or injury-feigning.

b Used nest or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey).

c Recently fledged young (nidicolous species)[1] or downy young (nidifugous species)[2].

d Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nests or nest-holes, the contents of which cannot be seen) or adult seen incubating.

e Adult carrying fecal sac or food for young.

f Nest containing eggs.

g Nest with young seen or heard.

C **Feeding:** Under this category we would like notes on the sudden influx of birds (especially unusual[3] species) as a response to any seasonal change in flora, e.g., flowering or fruiting of trees, or in habitat e.g., gradual drying up of waterbody, controlled burning of grassland, etc.

D **District Checklists:** By and large the overall distribution of Indian birds is known and recorded at a macro level. A more detailed picture would emerge if we had checklists for each District. We will maintain District Lists either at the BSAP office or with Regional Referees and only those birds not already listed in these lists will be printed in these columns.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The break-up of sections under 'Breeding' is from *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1976 edition). I read about this in an article by Norman Lavers (1997): Common birds, *uncommon* birding. *Birdwatcher's Digest* 19(4): 60-67, and asked Mr Krys Kazmierczak whether he could look into the matter and send us a list. Prompt as usual, it was in my e-mail the next day. Thanks Krys!

NOTES:

1 Birds which hatch in relative helpless state, and remain in nest for a good time after hatching (like most passerines).

2 Birds which hatch in an advances state of development and leave nest almost immediately (e.g. ground birds).

3 Not usually seen at other times of the year.

Renew your membership at the current rates (all categories) before 31st March, 1998 for the period 1-4-1998 to 31-3-1999. New rates will be effective from 1st April, 1998. Better, become a Life Member at the current rate!!

[Note: Renewals before 31-3-1998, of all categories, except 'Life', will be accepted for *one* year only].

For Private Circulation Only

For more information write to: Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh, P.O. Box 45, Banjara Hills Post Office, Hyderabad 500034. India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj Taher. **Membership** (Rs): Admission=10; Ordinary=35; Student=15 per annum; Life=500. **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh **No. 83 : March 1998**

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 22-03-1998: Manjira Reservoir, Medak District : The AP Forest Dept., has kindly agreed to arrange 2 jeeps to take 20 members to Manjira. Reservations of seats on first-cum-first-served basis. Contact Aasheesh Pittie (Ph: 3350683) or Siraj Taher (Ph: 3352607) between 7-9 p.m. Starting point is from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta, at 7.30 a.m. sharp. Those coming directly to Manjira by public transport may do so, and meet the group at the Barrage around 9:30 a.m. Buses leave Jubilee & Imliban Bus Stands for Manjira (*via* Sangareddi). We request members with personal transport, willing to accommodate people, to volunteer and inform the above persons and make the trip a success for all. This will be a full day trip and members are requested to be prepared with lunch and drinking water.

INDOOR MEETING: 16-03-1998, 6 p.m.: Slide Show: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

During January 1998, the A.P. Forest Department conducted a week-long nature camp for children from various schools at Mrugavani National Park, Chilkur. Siraj A Taher, Rajiv Mathew and Aasheesh Pittie, members of the Society, helped the department by taking participants on a 2-hour birdwatching walk in the Park on each day.

2 February 1998 was celebrated as **World Wetlands Day** throughout the world. This date is the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands in Ramsar, Iran, (known as the Ramsar Convention), in 1971. The Society participated by taking about 70 children from 5th and 6th classes of Vidyaranya High School, Hyderabad, to ICRISAT campus, Patancheru, on 8-2-1998. Children learnt about wetlands through the medium of wetland birds. Birds were identified and members spoke of their habits, migration, etc. The heronry of Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* elicited much excitement. After lunch, drawing paper and paints were given to the children who were asked to paint a scene from the mornings' experiences. Later, the President of the Society gave away certificates of participation to the thrilled kids! A copy of Martin Woodcock's *Collins Handguide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-Continent* was also presented by him to the school's library. We thank our member, Dr Tom C Hash, for making this memorable outing possible.

The Society has received a donation of 132 colour slides from **Dr. Eric J. Lott**, UK. He is particularly interested in birds of south India and "shows slides in UK to various groups, to groups in India, when I'm there, and I donate sets of slides to those who wish to educate other concerning the wildlife of S. India, esp. endangered birdlife." At last, the Society has the foundation for a slide collection of its own. Though the Society had approached many individuals for duplicates of their seconds' slides, few had come forward with a donation of such quality and generosity. The Society is indeed grateful to Dr. Lott for his magnanimous gesture. The Society would like to thank Mr J N Prasad, Bangalore, of the Merlin Nature Club, who arranged to deliver the slides to us and to our member Dr K Madhukar Reddy, who brought them over from Bangalore!

Media Fusion, Bangalore has just released a new CD-ROM on "Indian Wildlife" by Mr.E Hanumantha Rao, an ace photographer with 40 years experience in Wildlife photography. He is a recipient of national and international awards. His pictures have been published in more than 1200 books and magazines the world over.

This CD-ROM (yet to be reviewed) covers over 650 full screen pictures of mammals, birds, reptiles and insects, 30 important Parks and Sanctuaries, comprehensive index for easy access. It can be used both on Windows 3.1 version and above and also MAC68030 8 MB RAM sytem 7.0.

List price in shops in Bangalore is Rs. 995/- plus taxes. Packaging and forwarding extra. For a special rate please send in your inquiries to the address given below. Currently available in Bangalore. (JN Prasad, Merlin Nature Club, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, Sarakki ITI Layout, JP Nagar 1st Phase, Bangalore 560078. e-mail: avian@giasbg.vsnl.net.in).

A famous ornithologist was asked to be the keynote speaker at the opening of a new bird sanctuary. Since he had a scheduling conflict, all he could do was send his egrets. [Elizabeth Borzoie in *Readers' Digest*, December 1997. (Contributed by M Shafaat Ulla)].

Member's Identification (ID) Cards are enclosed with this bulletin. If any member does not receive one, please contact the Hon. Secretary.

Grey Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* [Art: Sachin Jaltare]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—14

"The newest and most exciting development is the attempt to go back to the very basis of relationship, the genetic program itself. Techniques of DNA matching are now being developed (Hoyer *et al.*, 1964) [*Science*, 144: 959-967—K.G.] which hold much promise. It is not yet certain that these methods can be made sensitive enough to add to the existing information, but the study of evolving molecules superimposed on the background of classical taxonomy is bound to reveal discrepancies and inaccuracies which will lead to improvements in classification." (E. Mayr, 1969, *Principles of Systematic Zoology*, pp. 134-135)

"An increasing number of systematists are using 'genetic' or 'molecular' data to form sets of taxa. These investigations include the analysis of karyotypes (chromosome number and structure), indirect techniques of estimating 'genetic distances' among organisms (DNA hybridization, electrophoresis, and immunological similarity), or the 'direct' comparison of the amino acid sequences of a given protein among various taxa..... The methods of analysis adopted in these studies, although routinely used to produce branching diagrams depicting concepts of relationship, are qualitatively different from the methods discussed in this book, in that they make no attempt to distinguish between primitive and derived similarities. ..... This approach is analogous methodologically to the concept of general 'overall similarity' adopted by numerical taxonomy in that similarity is expressed as a numerical value in a data matrix, and then the latter is used to produce a branching diagram of some kind." (N. Eldredge & J. Cracraft, 1980, *Phylogenetic Patterns and the Evolutionary Process*, pp. 47-48)

(....continued from *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4)

Finally, the remaining question pertains to the classification 'sequence' adopted by the *ANNOTATED CHECKLIST*. The DNA-hybridization based research, used for *quantitative* analyses of bird groups and their phylogenetic relationships, has resulted in the most *significant* deviation from currently accepted classifications, going back to that of Alexander Wetmore [1960, *A Classification for the Birds of the World*, Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, 139(11): 1-37]. Following this, one began with the Order Gaviiformes, Family Gaviidae (Divers), and ended with the Family Emberizidae of the Passeriformes. This up-ended and made topsy-turvy earlier sequences, of Hume through Oates & Blanford to Stuart Baker, which started off with the Corvidae (Crows, Magpies, Tree Pies, Jays, Nutcrackers, Choughs) of the Order Passeres and stopped with the Colymbidae (Divers) of the Pygopodes. This reversal was only because earlier classifications began with the most 'advanced' groups and ended with those considered highly 'primitive', but Wetmore and contemporaries felt it better to *climb* the phylogenetic tree, from the base upwards. The Perching Birds, with a highly evolved 'voice-box' enabling 'songs' of great melody and range, had to be on top of the tree, while the birds adapted to life on the sea and inland waters with croaking ('frog-like') sounds were best kept at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder.

Sibley, Monroe and Ahlquist's sequence demonstrates what can only be described as a shuffling of the present pack of cards. I have yet to obtain and study the original theses and the many reviews and criticisms of this DNA-based work, but, except within the Passeriformes, I am a lot perplexed with the 'new' sequence of Orders and Families. Sibley *et al.* begin with the Struthioniformes (Ostriches) and go on to the Craciformes and Megapodiidae (Megapodes or 'Scrubfowl') and then to the Galliformes family Phasianidae (Pheasant, Grouse, Partridges, Quails). This leads to the Anseriformes (Ducks and Geese) which is followed by the Bustard-Quails ('Buttonquails') which have been assigned an entire Order (Turniciformes) and Family for themselves! Then follow ten orders of extremely diverse land birds, from Honeyguides, Wryneck, Woodpeckers and Barbets (Piciformes) through Hornbills (Bucerotiformes), Hoopoe (Upupiformes), Trogons (Trogoniformes), Rollers, Kingfishers, Bee-eaters (Coraciiformes), Cuckoos and Coucals (Cuculiformes), Parrots (Psittaciformes), Swifts (Apodiformes), Frogmouths, Nightjars and Owls (Strigiformes) to Pigeons and Doves (Columbiformes). The last section of the non-Passeriformes is supposed to contain the Bustards, Cranes and Rails (Gruiformes) which follow up with an amazingly heterogeneous (polyphyletic?) group ('Order'?) of land and water birds including Sandgrouse, Snipe, Shore birds, Pratincoles, Gulls, Terns, Hawks, Eagles, Vultures, Falcons, Grebes, Sea birds, Storks, Flamingoes, Pelicans, and what not! Is there a logical explanation for the apparent 'genetic similarity' of such an assemblage of the feathered kind? Until I am convinced of the monophyly of Sibley *et al.*'s "Ciconiformes", I refuse to swallow such a 'large' pill!

In the Passeriformes, which are evolutionarily young and so are much less disparate, there are fewer 'shocks', except for the currently more-encompassing Corvidae. This family now also includes, ostensibly, the Mangrove Whistler, Swallow-Shrike, Orioles, Drongos, Ioras, Cuckoo Shrikes, Minivets, Wood Shrikes, and what were once thought members of the Muscicapidae like the Fantail, Paradise and Monarch Flycatchers! This 'lumping' of assorted, once distinct families is also rather 'suspicious' and requires confirmation through careful study, using many more *qualitative* 'characters'. It is interesting though that the Master Swedish Taxonomist, who latinized his own name to Carolus Linnaeus, had included the Paradise Flycatcher in the genus *Corvus* way back in 1758!

The other major re-alignments of Passeriform families are as follows. With the Muscicapidae (Babblers, Flycatchers, Warblers, Thrushes, Chats) losing Rhipidurinae, Monarchinae and Pachycephalinae to the Corvidae, it now includes just the Muscicapinae ***s. str.*** (= in the strict sense) and Turdinae—these are the true Flycatchers and then the Thrushes, Chats, Redstarts, Shama, Robins, Shortwings, Rubythroat, Grandala, Bluethroat, Forktails, Cochoa, Wheatears and Blackbirds. The Sylviidae, earlier a subfamily of the larger Muscicapidae, is treated as a distinct family now, including the true Warblers, Tesias, Tailors (Tailor Birds), Willow Warblers (*Phylloscopus*), Flycatcher-Warblers, Mesiã, Shrike-Babbler, Barwing, Minla, Fulvetta, Sibia, Yuhina, Parrotbills and Whitethroats. The Goldcrest is separated as the Regulidae and, so also the Fantail Warblers (*Cisticola*), Wren-Warblers (*Prinia*) and Scrub Warbler (*Scotocerca*) as the Cisticolidae.

The Broadbills (Eurylaimidae), after the Pittas (Pittidae), are followed by the Fairy Bluebird and the Chloropses (Irenidae, minus the Ioras), Shrikes (Laniidae), Waxwings (Bombycillidae; *Hypocolius* raised to the family Hypocoliidae), Dippers (Cinclidae), Mynas and Starlings (Sturnidae), Swallows and Martins (Hirundinidae), Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae), White-eyes (Zosteropidae) and Larks (Alaudidae), all of which retain their family status. But, the Wrens (Troglodytinae) and Spotted Creeper (Salpornithinae) are now combined with the Tree Creepers in the family Certhiidae. Likewise, the Nuthatches and Wall Creepers remain in the Sittidae. The family Paridae now only constitutes of the True, Fire-capped and Penduline Tits (Titmice), because the long-tailed Tits (*Aegithalos*) are raised to the family Aegithalidae. Flowerpeckers are combined with Sunbirds and Spiderhunters in the Nectariniidae. What was Ploceidae is now named Passeridae, correctly, comprising of Sparrows, Weavers and Munias, but also including Pipits, Wagtails and Accentors, which were distinct families (Motacillidae, Prunellidae) earlier.

There is no argument about which family occupies the evolutionary 'pinnacle' of the Class Aves—the Fringillidae, comprising of Finches and Buntings. The latter, earlier recognized as a separate family Emberizidae, are now downgraded to subfamily status. Zafar Futehally (1997, *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, 37: 70) is incorrect in stating that Emberizidae, Oriolidae and Dicruridae "have been eliminated" (poor

word selection!). The fact is that the first named family is now treated as a sub-family of Fringillidae, and the latter two as tribes of the Corvidae.

To recapitulate and summarize my 'first impression' of the *ANNOTATED CHECKLIST* prepared by the Oriental Bird Club, I must reiterate my unwillingness to adopt all of these changes unquestionably. I believe that Sibley, Monroe and Ahlquist's new DNA-hybridization based classification needs to be critically re-examined, for phylogenetic and biogeographic veracity, by experienced bird taxonomists, before we accept it. Yes, Ripley's classification and nomenclature needs refinement and updating, but, if the biosystematics of taxa can be 'magically' resolved just by DNA-hybridization work "used as a base for the systematic sequence, species limits and nomenclature" (Inskipp *et al.*, 1996: 2), biosystematists like me may as well 'hang up our gloves' and ignore the painstaking comparative work done by specialists during the past two hundred and fifty years. The unfortunate current attitude, believing that "the earlier publications have less relevance to current study" (see Burg *et al.*, 1994, *ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY*, p. 1), is a typical non-taxonomist's viewpoint, shutting out chunks of valuable data, and automatically introducing a fallibility, akin to a *tonga* horse with blinders.

The *ANNOTATED CHECKLIST* also sadly lacks information on the following points. That distributional data for each species included is not given, reduces its usefulness fundamentally. For Indian sub-continent users, omission of Ripley's *NEW SYNOPSIS* numbers, for species occurring here, is also inconvenient and makes reference work much harder for us. This 'modern', popular science book trend, of not citing the authors of species names, is woeful, making access to published information limited and the presentation unsatisfactory, according to the highest taxonomic traditions. Again, by typesetting *English* names in boldface lettering, it becomes apparent that the authors' priorities are skewed away from giving justified prominence to *Scientific* names. Further, the geographical area covered by this Checklist (see "Map of the Oriental Bird Club Region") is neither biogeographically accurate *vis-à-vis* the limits of the Oriental Region (northern China is extralimital), nor politically all-inclusive, *e.g.*, Indonesia is without Irian Jaya (western New Guinea island). The title of the book, therefore, is misleading since the authors chose to cover their "Oriental Bird Club Region" (which does not make any scientific sense!), and *not* the Oriental Biogeographical Region as is understood today by biogeographers.

I am preparing an updated cross-reference, to species cited in the *NEW SYNOPSIS*, and their nomenclature in the *ANNOTATED CHECKLIST*, for the convenience of users in India and adjacent countries. But, I think bird watchers here should continue using Ripley's sequence and nomenclature, except for the few justifiable changes in Inskipp *et al.* that I propose to incorporate in a future issue of *HUMEA, Field Ornithology*, until nomenclature (both scientific and English) and phylogeny are confirmed unquestionably in future, after more scientific debate. Incidentally, the decisions taken on "*Taxonomy, Nomenclature, and Geographic Names*" by Burg, Beehler & Ripley in their *ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY* (1994: 3) are, I believe, certainly more *practical*, in the present context.

Like I noticed earlier, amateur bird watchers are 'ruling the roost' nowadays but, hopefully, A.O. Hume's prayer (in *Stray Feathers*, 1: 417; 1873), that both 'Cabinet Naturalists' (museum specialists) and Field Naturalists must work together closely, will be heard now. "Destructive criticism should always be accompanied by advice", wrote Hugh Whistler when finishing off his *OPEN LETTER*, so, for you bird watchers faced with biotechnology waving DNA 'fingerprints' at you, here is my circumspect counsel. Let's not succumb to the current 'designer fashion' craze in classification and nomenclature, just to "keep up with the Jones's", but let's take more time to learn how the 'cloth is cut', before selling it, not 'short', but in silky, carefully embroidered, hand-crafted, durable lengths! (*concluded*) **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**

[Errata in Letter # 13 - Line 10 from bottom of p. 3 should read: "BIRDBOOK (Salim Ali, 1996, *Book of Indian Birds*, 12th rev. edn), INDIAN (COMPACT) HANDBOOK, PICTORIAL GUIDE, and NOMENCLATURE"]

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Notes, Abbreviations and Contributors are at the end.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT (VS)

Sri Venkateshwara National Park 25-26.12.1997

TAWNY EAGLE 1; BLACK EAGLE 2; CRESTED TREE SWIFT; SCIMITAR BABBLER hrd; BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH 1M; THICKBILLED FLOWERPECKER 2-3; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD feeding on nectar of Loranthus.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT (AP)

Banjara Hills, Hyderabad city

SHIKRA 19.02: PRB. M disp.; COUCAL 19.02: PRB. collecting N-mat.; MAGPIE-ROBIN 14.01, 19.02: PRB. M singing from tree-tops.

Hyderabad City

PARIAH KITE Jan-Feb 98: CB. N in various parts of the city.

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT (AP)

Palmakole Tank 25.01

PAINTED STORK 108; OPENBILL STORK 5; SPOONBILL 19; RUDDY SHELDUCK 5.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT (SAK)

Bachpalli Tank 30.01

OPENBILLED STORK 3.

Gangaram Tank 30.01

REDCRESTED POCHARD 65+; MARSH HARRIER 2; COOT 200+ CB. inc., 20 juv.; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 5 in non-br., plm; KENTISH PLOVER 1.

Kompalli Kancha (Grassland) 26.01

HARRIERS *Circus* sp. 10-12 coming in to roost at dusk.

NELLORE DISTRICT (VS)

Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary

GREY PELICAN 15.12.97: CB. 350+ N building/incubating. 27.12.97: 400+ nesting; INDIAN SHAG 15.12.97: CB. 700+ N building & incubating; OPENBILL STORK 15.12.97: CB 200+ N. 27.12.97: CB 400-500, 4-5 N with yng.; WHITE IBIS 15.12.97: CB 50+ N. 27.12.97: CB 200-300, 1-2 N with 2-3 yng., each;

Pulicat Bird Sanctuary

FLAMINGO 15,27.12.97: 2000+ including juv., 2500+; LESSER FLAMINGO 15.12.97: *c.* 100; BARHEADED GOOSE 15-16.01: 245; RUDDY SHELDUCK 15-16.01: 5; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 15-16.01: 1; PEREGRINE FALCON 27.12.97: 1. 15-16.01: 1; TEMMINCK'S STINT 27.12.97: 50+; LONGTOED STINT[1] 15.12.97: 1; RUFF 15-16.01: 50; AVOCET 27.12.97: 500+; COLLARED SAND MARTIN 27.12.97: 3-4 in flock of Redrumped Swallows, in flt., & on wires; INDIAN WREN-WARBLER 27.12.97: 1 PRB. Carrying N-matl.

Tada, Pulicat Lake 15-16.01
LITTLE CORMORANT & INDIAN SHAG CB N had juv., & imm., birds; GREY HERON CB. Several N in *Ficus* sp., each with 2-4 juv.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bannerghatta National Park (SK)
HAIR CRESTED DRONGO 29.01; COPPERSMITH 30.01 PRB. Const., N.

Bellandur tank 26.01 (UHK)
PINTAIL 128; SHOVELER 7216; MARSH HARRIER 3; PURPLE MOORHEN 24; BLACKWINGED STILT 51.

Byramangala Reservoir 25.01
GREY PELICAN 2 (UHK); PURPLE SUNBIRD CB. N built in Eresid Spider (social spiders) colony. 2 yng. (JNP).

Gabbadi Tank 25.01 (JNP)
SPOTBILL DUCK CB. Ad., with 10 yng; BRAHMINY KITE PRB. Carrying N-mat.; ASHYCROWNED FINCH-LARK CB. Ad., carrying food.

Harohalli tank 25.01 (JNP)
PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 7 *rare*.

Hoskote tank: 18.01 (UHK)
GREY PELICAN 2; PAINTED STORK 84; OPENBILL STORK 60; WHITE STORK 6; WHITE IBIS 6; SPOONBILL 43; BARHEADED GOOSE 13; BRAHMINY DUCK 10; UNIDENTIFIED DUCKS 2500+; BROWNHEADED GULL 65; RIVER TERN 8.

Jigani Tank 25.01 (UHK)
LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 40; COTTON TEALS 22; COMB DUCK 14.12.1997: 2 *rare* (JNP). 2; KESTREL 1 M; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 2.

Yellamallappa Shetty tank: 18.01 (UHK)
GREY PELICAN 1; LARGE CORMORANT 20.

MANDYA DISTRICT (VS)

Kokrebellur Bird Sanctuary 18.12.97
GREY PELICAN 200+ CB. N building, incubation only on *Ficus* sp.; BLACK IBIS 10 perched on Tamarind tree.

Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary
LARGE CORMORANT 18,21.12.97: CB 300-400 incubating/with yng; DARTER 18,21.12.97: *c.* 12; WHITENECKED STORK 21.12.97: 2; GREYHEADED FISHING EAGLE 18.12.97: 1; GREAT STONE PLOVER 18,21.12.97: 20-25; STORKBILLED KINGFISHER 18.12. 97: 3; CLIFF SWALLOW 21.12.97: 20-30.

MYSORE DISTRICT (VS)

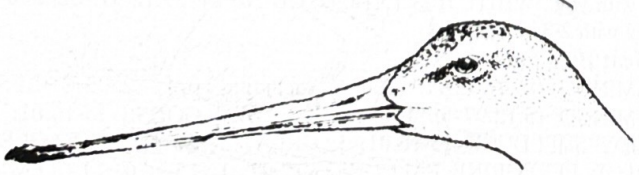
Bandipur National Park
BONELLI'S EAGLE 17.12.97: 1; TAWNY EAGLE 21.12.97: 1; ALPINE SWIFT 21.12.97: 3-4; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 17.12.97: 1.

Mysore city outskirts
DARTER 23.12.97: 5-6; GREY PELICAN 16.12.97: 1. 23.12.97: 7-8 including 2-3 juv.; GLOSSY IBIS 21.12.97: 12.

KERALA

ERNAKULAM DISTRICT (CVA)

North Parur
STORKBILLED KINGFISHER 3.12.97; SMALL GREEN BARBET 25.12.97: CB. N in coconut palm; COMMON MYNA 31.12.97: CB N in coconut palm; WHITETHROATED GROUND THRUSH 18.11.97.



Blacktailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

TAMIL NADU

CHENNAI DISTRICT (VS)

Adyar Estuary & Theosophical Society Grounds, Chennai
LARGE EGRET 30.11.97: 1; GARGANEY 30.11.97: 12; GREY PLOVER 24,30.11.97: 2; EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER 30.11.97: 150+; CURLEW-SANDPIPER 30.11.97: 1; PITTA 30.11.97: 3-4 hrd; RICHARD'S PIPIT 24.11.97: 1-2 hrd.

Alwarpet, Chennai
KOEL 02.11.97: CB. Yng hrd begging for food.

Guindy National Park, Chennai
LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 24.12.97: 12+ at A.K. Tank; PEREGRINE FALCON 14.12.97: 1; REDWINGED CRESTED CUCKOO 14.12.97 [1]; INDIAN TREE PIE 24.12.97: PRB. 3 disp.; ASHY MINIVET 11.01: 4-5 hrd.

Mylapore, Chennai
DABCHICK 22.11.97: 2 on Chitrakulam Temple tank. In crowded area, was dry till a few days ago.

Santhome, Chennai
POND HERON[2] 1-10.11.97; CATTLE EGRET[2] 1-10.11.97; HOUSE CROW 11.11.97: Feeding on ripe Neem[3] fruit, which is plucked in flt.

KANCHEEPURAM DISTRICT (VS)

Nanmangalam Reserve Forest
HONEY BUZZARD 30.11.97: 1; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 30.11.97: PRB. Calling & disp. (?); KESTREL 23,30.11.97: 1,2; SPOTTED DOVE 23.11.97: PRB. Disp. flt; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 23.11.97: CB. Several inc., 2 juv.; PLAINTIVE CUCKOO 23.11.97: 4-5, LM; BROWN SHRIKE 23,30.11.97: Few; BLACKHEADED MYNA 23,30.11.97: CB. Several juv.; GREYHEADED MYNA 23,30.11.97: 4-5, LM; JUNGLE WREN-WARBLER 23.11.97: CB. 1 N in bush, 1' above ground. Ad. feeding yng & removing fecal-sac; RICHARD'S PIPIT 23,30.11.97: Few;

Vedanthangal 24.12.97
LITTLE CORMORANT & INDIAN SHAG *c.* 1500. CB N; DARTER CB. 4-5 N with eggs.; GREY PELICAN 60+ CB. Const., N &/or incubating; GREY HERON CB N; OPENBILL STORK 400+ CB N; WHITE IBIS 300+ CB N; GLOSSY IBIS 120+; SPOONBILL 200+ CB N; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 1; LARGE GREY BABBLER 4-5.

Velacherry Marshes 30.11.97
GARGANEY 3-4; UNIDENTIFIED DUCKS 200+; GREAT STONE PLOVER 6-8.

NILGIRI DISTRICT (VS)

Masinagudi 16.12.97
NILGIRI WOOD PIGEON 1 in flt.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CS-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; f-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP), CV Aneesh (CVA), JN Prasad (JNP), S Ashok Kumar (SAK), S Karthikeyan (SK), U Harish Kumar (UHK), V Santharam (VS).

NOTES:

1. New record for Andhra Pradesh.
2. Author suspects local movement coinciding with the onset of NE & SW monsoon soon.
3. *Azadirachta indica*.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

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PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 84 : April 1998

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 19-04-1998, 8.30 a.m.: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad, Rangareddi District : We request members with personal transport, willing to accommodate people, to volunteer and inform the Hon. Secretary and make the trip a success for all. This may be a full day trip and members are requested to be prepared with lunch and drinking water. We meet at bus stand at Anantgiri.

INDOOR MEETING: 27-04-1998, 6 pm: Talk & slide show on Tiger by Hashim Tyabji: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

The Society's field trip to ICRISAT campus on 1-3-1998 was a resounding success. 35 members attended and 108 species of birds were seen! Interesting birds are listed under *Birding Notes* elsewhere in this issue. The day began with members gathering near the entrance while some administrative work like taking memberships and handing out new ID cards was carried out. We boarded the ICRISAT bus and headed toward Campus Lake, a small tank close to the main buildings with a large banyan *Ficus bengalensis* in one corner. This tree is much used or abused by members of the cormorant and heron family. It bears a white-washed look from the guano and members standing downwind from it move away rapidly! A Indian Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* was singing 'stentore-ously' from the thick growth of Bulrush *Typha latifolia* on the bank. There are a few settling ponds adjacent to this tank where some Shovellers *Anas clypeata* and other ducks were seen. From here we drove to Patancheru Tank which lies outside ICRISAT but shares a common boundary and birds can be watched through a chain link fence. While watching the antics of terns and searching for the albino Coot *Fulica atra* which was seen here last year, Hyder the 'raptorphil' spotted what he wished would have been a bird of prey. Alas it turned out to be a Grey Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, the first confirmed sighting of this species on the ICRISAT Patancheru campus! It was following 2 Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala* which had loafed overhead a while ago.

The birds at ICRISAT are used to vehicles and people and the fact that no harm comes to them from either. So they do not take evasive action unless hard pressed. First-timers and shutter-bugs had a field day with the colourful Roller *Coracias benghalensis* and Bluetailed Bee-Eater *Merops philippensis* which perched nonchalantly on the fencing and other perches in the campus. The third stop was at ICRISAT Lake, a large tank in the middle of the campus, which was host to a large population (>2000 birds!) of Shovellers and Brahminy duck *Tadorna ferruginea*, etc. The last stop was the Heronry at Red Tank. This heronry comprises of *c.* 50 Borassus Palm which house the nests of Large Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. Nesting of these two species overlap in time but generally does not occur simultaneously in the same tree. The cormorants had largely finished nesting—but many immature birds were to be seen. Now almost each palm had a minimum of 3 Grey Heron nests. Thus there were about 150 nests and 400+ birds! Some birds were adding twigs to their nests, some incubating, some shielding their brood from a hot sun and others bringing food for their nestlings. A few Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* are known to nest in these palms too, but though a few were seen and their loud calls heard, none were seen nesting at this time. Sachin and Shrikant, our artist members, had a busy time. Lunch followed, in the well laid-out cafeteria of the main building, after which everybody gathered on the lawns for an impromptu discussion of the day's birding. Reservations for seats were taken for the next field trip to Manjira and we ended with a vote of thanks from our President, for Dr Tom Hash and ICRISAT's management for their cooperation and assistance. All in all, a very satisfying day!

For some of us it did not end there. We had planned to bird-watch in the evening too and so Kulkarni, Tom and I stayed back. It was well worth it. It had cooled considerably and the smell of rain- enriched earth wafted on the breeze. Tom said it came from Hyderabad! True enough, when we returned, the city had had a shower. ICRISAT Lake was alive with waterfowl. Shovellers, Pintail *Anas acuta* and Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* in full breeding regalia were a wonderful sight. Among the Pintail were 2 males which had pinkish-orange instead of pure white breast and belly. We wondered whether they were specimens of a die-marked population for migratory studies or it was the result of feeding. 8 people responded to an inquiry on the Internet. Some reasons cited for this abnormality are: Feather blush which results from the deposition of small quantities of carotenoids in the feathers; staining from minerals like iron or tannins in the water.

On the far side of this 'Lake', sitting at the edge of the water, were 30 odd Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*. In fact, the harrier population at ICRISAT is 'fantastic'. As evening approached, we coasted around, counting harriers. When we stopped near some fallow fields, we counted over 150 birds roosting on the ground at a population density of about 10 birds per hectare! As darkness descended, more were winging their way low over the ground to roost within the safety ICRISAT campus provides. A conservative estimate of the roosting population of harriers within ICRISAT would be a minimum of 500 birds. *This makes it the second largest 'protected' roosting site for harriers in Andhra Pradesh and one of the prime roosting site areas for the country.* I am sure there are many thousands of acres of grasslands and wasteland where harriers must be roosting in Andhra Pradesh, of which we know nothing! [Aasheesh Pittie]

After the re-discovery of Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilos bitorquatus* in 1986 and Blewitt's Owlet *Athene blewittii* in 1997 it seems to be the turn of Rothschild's Parakeet *Psittacula intermedia* in 1998! Rajat Bhargava, who works for TRAFFIC-India at Delhi, claims to have found it around Dehra Dun and Nainital. He is confident that it is the Rothschild's Parakeet he has seen and none other. The only known specimens of this bird are in the American Museum of Natural His-

tory, New York (AMNH) and very little is known of its habitat, distribution, habits and behaviour. Controversies had surrounded its rediscovery in Varanasi in 1975 (specimen with BNHS, Mumbai) and a long-standing theory that *Psittacula intermedia* is a hybrid of the Roseringed Parakeet *P. krameri* and Blossomheaded or Slatyheaded Parakeet *P. cyanocephala* has not been proved either way. Rajat says that if the birds he has seen are hybrids then the specimens in AMNH should also be those of hybrid birds. "Whatever it may be, a true species or a hybrid, it is still called a 'Rothschild's Parakeet' and I have found it after 103 years. Only a DNA test will show the truth." Rajat, who is doing his Ph.D. at Aligarh Muslim University, has ample opportunity to study the *Psittacula* group of birds. He says that it is easy to miss observing this bird amongst a flock of Blossomheaded Parakeets, with which the Rothschild's Parakeet integrates, as the differences between them are few and not distinctive. He estimates a population of about 100 birds in the lower Western Himalayas and emphasizes the need for urgent conservation measures.

His love for the Parakeets (or 'Parrots' as they are commonly called), earned him the nick-name "Tota" (the Hindi word for parrot), amongst his school friends in Meerut. We will have to wait and see if the claims of this young man are proved correct. If they are, then congratulations to him! [condensed by Siraj A. Taher from *Business Standard* Saturday, 24 January 1998]

"A couple of years ago I got curious about the longest and shortest bird names, so I downloaded the Sibley and Monroe list from the web, loaded it into a spreadsheet, and sorted it by name length. There's no bird name quite as long as *Notiocryptorrhynchus punctatocarinulatus* (a weevil), but the winner in the bird world, with 36 characters (including the space): *Griseotyrannus aurantioatrocristatus* Crowned Slaty Flycatcher.

"The runners up, with 31 characters: *Xiphocolaptes promeropirhynchus* Strong-billed Woodcreeper; *Campylorhamphus trochilirostris* Red-billed Scythebill; *Phyllastrephus madagascariensis* Long-billed Greenbul; *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus* Cactus Wren.

"The shortest bird names are: *Otus asio* Eastern Screech-Owl; *Pica pica* lack-billed Magpie; *Bubo bubo* urasian Eagle-Owl; *Mitu mitu* Alagoas Curassow; *Sula sula* Redfooted Booby; *Asio otus* Long-eared Owl; *Ara macao* Scarlet Macaw; *Apus apus* Common Swift; *Grus grus* Common Crane; *Crex crex* Corn Crake; *Anas puna* Puna Teal; *Tyto alba* Barn Owl; *Alle alle* Dovekie.

"I sorted the list by common names, too. Spaces, hyphens, and apostrophes all count as characters. The winners, with 35 characters are: *Lamprotornis elisabeth* Southern Blue-eared Glossy-Starling; *Nectarinia prigoginei* Prigogine's Double-collared Sunbird; *Nectarinia stuhlmanni* Stuhlmann's Double-collared Sunbird.

"And the runners up, with 34 characters: *Lamprotornis chalybaeus* Greater Blue-eared Glossy-Starling; *Serinus xanthopygius* Abyssin-ian Yellow-rumped Seedeater; *Rhinomyias addita* Streaky-breasted Jungle-Flycatcher.

"The shortest: *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae* Tui; *Dromaius novaehollandiae* Emu; *Gymnomyza samoensis* Mao; *Nestor notabilis* Kea; *Psittirostra psittacea* Ou."

[Charles W. "Will" Cook <cwcook@acpub.duke.edu>, Duke University Botany Dept., Durham, North Carolina]

Members whose membership expires on 31-3-1998 are requested to renew their membership at the new rates given below. The status of your membership is indicated on the address label of your envelope. An early renewal will prevent disappointment. Membership in Rupees: Life 1,000; Ordinary 100 p.a.; Student 25 p.a.; Corporate 2,000 (20 years); Foreign $ 15 p.a. Student membership is available only up to 10th class. Payment should favour "Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh" and should be sent to the address at the end of this Bulletin.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—15

"The importance of bees, butterflies and a host of other insects in the cross-fertilization of flowers is well known, but the significance of birds in the same capacity has been constantly underrated. It is a subject which has hitherto received no attention whatsoever from workers in India inspite of the vast opportunities the country offers for observation and study....."

"While it is but rarely that an ornithologist also possesses sufficient competence in botany to be able to conduct research of this nature without the aid of a specialist, and vice versa, an intimate co-operation between the two is clearly indicated for obtaining optimum results."

"It must be borne in mind that the mere fact of a bird being casually seen on a flower is by itself no evidence of the fact that the flower is ornithophilous or that the bird is an agent in its cross-pollination. (Salim A. Ali, 1932, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 35: 573-574)

Summer is here. I am writing this letter on *Holee* day, which natives of India believe signals the onset of the hot season in the sub-continent. Many of our flowering plants will bloom, attracting animal life of all kinds to their pollen and nectar. Perhaps the blaze of colours, in the form of powder and liquid, 'exchanged' on this festival day by humans signifies the many coloured blossoms that our flora put out in summer?

Let's put aside the matter of supposed 'effective' pollination carried out by our birds, and just look at *hard* data, on which bird species *actually* feed on floral nectaries and/or pollen loads of particular plant species. The above quotations are from Salim Ali's paper on "FLOWER-BIRDS AND BIRD-FLOWERS IN INDIA", which was one of his best works, written when he was only in his mid-thirties and had returned from a year's training under Prof. Erwin Stresemann at the Berlin University Zoological Museum in Germany. Salim Ali had then quickly chosen to go to Berlin, as opposed to London, "in the vitiated Indo-British atmosphere of the Gandhian era," in 1929. In *THE FALL OF A SPARROW* he wrote fondly of his "guru to the end," whose "simplicity and modesty, ...unassuming erudition, ...lively, almost boyish humour, and the vastness of ..scientific knowledge ..left ...a vivid impression and admiration for the man, the scientist, the mentor and the friend." I also consider his paper on "*The Ornithology of Travancore and Cochin*" (with notes by Hugh Whistler, in 8 Parts, 1935-1937, *J.B.N.H.S.*, Vols 37-39) the best faunistic study of his lifetime. This no doubt was a direct result of his apprenticeship under Stresemann, witness his acknowledgement— "There is no doubt the Berlin proved for me the luckiest turning at the crossroads of my ornithological career. Considering that I was only an unknown and aspiring ornithologist at the time..." Such fortuitous '*kismet*' is the privilege of a select few. Mother Nature was indeed kind!

Salim Ali's 1932 paper is, sadly, still about the only 'weighty' one on birds and flowers. It is excellent reading, with 16 half-tone photographs, a product of this then 'budding' cameraman as well. The available Indian database on this subject was reviewed by S. Subramanya & T.R. Radhamani (1993, *Current Science*, 65: 201-209) recently, but they omitted citing the "Forest types of India" architect H.G. Champion's (1932, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 36: 267-268) follow-up of Salim Ali's pioneering effort. Bird-flower interaction is going on now in nature, and as Salim Ali had opined, "this branch of research lies more within the sphere of the field ornithologist than in that of the botanist..." So, bird-watchers need only to collect specimens of the flowers on which bird visits are observed and obtain the specialist assistance of taxonomi

botanists to name the plant species. I do wish some readers of these Letters decide to do just this, in the pre-monsoon flowering season *now*, so that information on these aspects builds up gradually. I may also bring to attention a related topic of similar interactions, between fruit-eating birds and bird-dispersed plants, so usefully presented recently by P. Balasubramanian (1996, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 93: 428-441).

Our editors (in *Pitta* # 72, April 1997) initiated a "Project Hair-crested Drongo" last year (see *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, 37:48, May-June 1997). The B.N.H.S. Honorary Secretary volunteered data based on their bird collection (*Pitta* # 73, May 1997) and the Rishi Valley School sent its 7-year observational data (*NLBW*, 37: 110, Nov-Dec. 1997). In this *Newsletter* issue, M.K. Himmatsinhji wrote, in some interesting detail, about his experiences with *Dicrurus hottentottus* Linnaeus. The species name is a misnomer, Linnaeus basing it on a mistaken type-locality (incorrectly "Cape of Good Hope" in S. Africa, later correctly restricted to Sikkim by Stuart Baker). Himmatsinhji writes of his ornithological credibility being established through his authentic record of this drongo in Cutch, with the support of Lavkumar Khacher and Humayun Abdulali. He mentions Stuart Baker's "Murree to Eastern Assam" distributional record (*NEW FAUNA*, 2: 370), which both Salim Ali & Ripley (*INDIAN HANDBOOK*, 5: 132) and then T.J. Roberts in his *THE BIRDS OF PAKISTAN* (Vol . 2) had ignored for Pakistan. Forest-dwelling species like the Hair-crested Drongo do wander about, moving away from the Western Ghats in peninsular India. I myself was pleasantly surprised to see a pair of Yellow-legged Green Pigeons (*Treron phoenicoptera* Latham) hanging on, through a very windy and rainy night, to a branch of a neem (*Azadirachta indica* Adrien Jussieu; Meliaceae) tree outside a fifth floor apartment window in Ahmadabad city, in May end last year. Their feet-grabbing muscle power, and ability to quietly withstand pouring rain all night, amazed me, instantly raising my respect for these pigeons! Though the Hair-crested Drongo is apparently a specialist nectar-feeder, it also takes insects which come to flowers, as a variation in its diet.

I have just returned from attending a Symposium on Social Insects, held at Mudigere on the Chikmagalur Hills. My "First impressions on the Avifauna of Mudigere, Western Ghats" appeared in the *NLBW* [17(3): 5-10, March 1977], based on my initial visit to this cofee+cardamom--planted wooded area. One morning, I took a walk with my ant-specialist colleague around the Agricultural University's Research Station and watched several birds feeding as early as 0630-0730 hrs on flowers of *Erythrina* and other forest trees. Orange Minivet, Indian and Jungle Myna, Golden Oriole, White-eye, Grey-headed and Brahminy Starling, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Puple-rumped Sunbird, Iora, Grey and Yellow-cheeked Tit, Magpie Robin, Thick-billed Flowerpecker and Black Drongo were active, and a pair of Grey Junglefowl was also 'put up', accidentally. There were several papers on social insect (especially bee) pollinators read out by delegates at the Symposium, but birds weren't even mentioned! A BIRDS--BUTTERFLIES--BOTANY (Vertebrates—Invertebrates—Plants) approach is what I would like seen implemented by people who should attempt to become *naturalists*, not just entomologists or bird watchers. We are missing the "trees for the forest", and unless our endemic *plant* species are put on *top priority* for protection, rather than just the tiger, elephant and rhinoceros, our jungles will continue to be underrated, and plundered for economic gain by a greedy or simply 'dumb' few, giving little chance for the continued survival of most of our animals in their shrinking habitats. We must *protect* (and restore) *plants and their ecosystems* if we are to succeed in 'conserving' threatened animals -- this GREEN cover, in fact, allows us our very own breath of life, o.x.y.g.e.n., let's please not forget!

-- Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Notes, Abbreviations and Contributors are at the end.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT (KK)

Waterbody on Madanapally-Anantapur main road 16.11.1997 (near Rishi Valley School)
COOT 30, CB 4 yng.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills (AP)
SHIKRA 01.03: PRB M disp.; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 04.02 1 M.
Jubilee Hills 28.02 (SAK)
BLACK REDSTART 1.

MEDAK DISTRICT 1.3.98

ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru (AP)
GREY PELICAN 1; LARGE CORMORANT; GREY HERON 400+ CB 50 Borassus palm with *c.* 3 N per tree. Some N with yng.; PURPLE HERON 8; PAINTED STORK 15; WHITENECKED STORK 42; WHITE IBIS; BLACK IBIS; SPOONBILL 2; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 50; BRAHMINY DUCK 18; PINTAIL *c.* 150 in br., plm; GARGANEY 30; SHOVELLER *c.* 2500; COMMON POCHARD *c.* 150; COMB DUCK 1 F; GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE 2; PALLID, MONTAGU'S & MARSH HARRIER 500+ roosting; COMMON PEAFOWL 22; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 6; SPOTTED REDSHANK 1 coming into br plm.; RIVER TERN 25; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER; WIRETAILED SWALLOW CB ? N under culvert; INDIAN GREAT REED WARBLER 1 singing from typha[1].

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT[2]

Bangalore City
PARIAH KITE 16.03: CB incubating? (SK); SMALL GREEN BARBET 16.03: POB suspected N (SK); REDWHISKERED BULBUL 15.03: (PAU).
Ramamurthynagar
HOUSE SPARROW 16.03: PRB building N (BP).
Silvepura
SMALL GREEN BARBET 25.02: CB (PSJ); MAGPIE ROBIN 23.02: CB, N with 3 eggs (CEJL).
Yelahanka 13.03 (BSP)
LARGE PIED WAGTAIL CB (probably Incubating).

BIJAPUR DISTRICT

? 04.01 (CTH)
COMMON BUSTARD-QUAIL.

MANDYA DISTRICT

Shettihalli Heronry 08.03 (JNP, AmP)
Heronry on a few Fig trees on the busy Bangalore-Mysore highway. LITTLE CORMORANT CB, N; GREY HERON CB, 7 N (3 Nest building / reinforcing ?; 3 N with yng); NIGHT HERON CB, 4 N (2 imm).
Thailur tank 08.03

GREY PELICAN 17 fishing (JNP); PAINTED STORK 8 (JNP, AmP); BLACK IBIS 19 (JNP); BLACKTAILED GODWIT 43 (JNP, AmP); GREENSHANK 20+ (JNP); WHISKERED TERN 2 (UHK); BLACKBELLIED TERN 1 (UHK); BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 4 hawking dragonflies (JNP, AmP).

MYSORE DISTRICT

Ranganathitto Bird Sanctuary 14.03 (EHR)
SPOONBILL CB, 1N with 3 yng.

SHIMOGA DISTRICT

Bhadra River Project (SK)
ASHY CROWNED FINCH LARK 10.02: PRB courting pair.; TICKELL'S FLOWERPECKER PRB N building 11.02; YELLOW THROATED SPARROW 10.02.

TUMKUR DISTRICT

Devarayanadurga State Forest 01.03 (SK/JNP)
YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL PRB a pair peeling pieces/fibres off dry lantana bush and carrying them in their bill to a dense un-id., bush; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 1 M.

KERALA

ERNAKULAM DISTRICT (VS)

Kochi[3] Town 21-23.01
KOEL POB, singing; RUFOUS WOODPECKER 1 drumming; GREATER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO pair foraging on trunk of Areca-nut palm; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1 F; MAGPIE ROBIN PRB, song & territorial flights.

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM[4] DISTRICT (VS)

Thiruvananthapuram Town 18-20.01
KOEL POB, singing.

THRISSUR[5] DISTRICT (VS)

Thrissur Town 18.01
KOEL POB, singing.

MAHARASHTRA

AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICT (SuK)

Pimpalgaon Reservoir 04.01
DABCHICK 500+; PURPLE HERON 1; SPOTBILL 2; MARSH HARRIER 1; PURPLE MOORHEN 9; COOT 500+; BLACKWINGED STILT 15.

Visapur Dam
DABCHICK 200+; WHITENECKED STORK 1; FLAMINGO 30+; COOT 100+; BLACKWINGED STILT 15; HERRING GULL (?) 6; RIVER TERN 3; SWALLOW 200+; CLIFF SWALLOW 200+ above water; YELLOW WAGTAIL 3; GREY WAGTAIL 3.

AMRAVATI DISTRICT

Melghat Tiger Reserve 29.01 (AK)
BLACKCAPPED KINGFISHER.

TAMIL NADU

CHENNAI DISTRICT

Chennai City (AR)
REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER[6] 23.01

Guindy National Park (VS)
BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER 14.12.1997: 6+ in song & territorial disp.

NAGAPPATTINAM QUAID-E-MILLETH DISTRICT

Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary 05.01 (AR)
BOOTED HAWK-EAGLE 1; WHITEBELLIED SEA EAGLE 1.

RAMANTHAPURAM DISTRICT

Uppur 06.01 (AR)
BLACK IBIS 7; ROSY PASTOR 50+.

TIRUCHCHIRAPPALLI DISTRICT

Tiruchchirappalli (BHC) 19.01 (AR)
BROWN FLYCATCHER 1.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

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NOTES:

[1] "The song may be heard sporadically all through the winter." [*Handbook*]

[2] In *Pitta* # 83 p. 4, Haircrested Drongo at Bannerghatta N.P. (Bangalore Dist., Karnataka), was seen on flowering Eucalyptus sp., and *Spathodea campanulata* trees.

[3] earlier Cochin.

[4] earlier Trivandrum.

[5] earlier Trichur.

[6] Not a common bird in Madras & at times confused with Bluethroated Flycatcher, when tail pattern is clinching evidence. (VS)

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

CORRESPONDENCE

"Your Society's *Pitta* is interesting. I am keen that you concentrate on Andhra Pradesh. It is, as I had told you, absolutely essential that we have in-depth regional news. The intrinsic value of your and your friends' enthusiasm and effort would be considerable in the years to come. We would have, as it were, an ongoing survey of the area. Could I suggest you use the excellent bibliography you have compiled to serialize old material on the State from the *Journal* and elsewhere? Perhaps, too, you could have a sketch map showing hill ranged, plateaux, rivers and lakes and indicate where a specific article or note comes from. This would in fact be a novel content sheet...The brief bird records should be concentrated to Andhra." [Lavkumar Khacher, 646 Vastunirman, Gandhinagar 382022]

"Did you know that we can find co-ordinates for 'most' of the localities any where in the world on Internet? Check out this Geonet website <http://164.214.2.59/gns/html/index.com> *or* <http://164. 214.2.59/gns> and hit the button: Access geonet. The rest is user friendly. By using wild-card (*) search, you can download details on up to 1000 localities at a time!"

[Dr S Subramanya, Asia Division, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK]

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For more information write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills Post Office, Hyderabad 500034. India.
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PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 85 : May 1998

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 10-05-1998, 7.30 am: Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad : We request members with personal transport, willing to accommodate people, to volunteer to the Hon. Secretary and make the trip a success. We meet in front of ticket counter.

INDOOR MEETING: 18-05-1998, 6 pm: Exhibition of Wildlife Paintings by Sachin Jaltare & Shrikant Wamanrao Kolhe & Talk on 'Falcons and Falconry' by Hyder Jaffer: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

FIELD TRIP TO ANANTGIRI: 19 APRIL 1998

The field trip almost did not happen for some of us who were traveling in Aasheesh Pittie's car. A couple of unscheduled stops caused by dirt in the fuel line followed by an abortive attempt at engaging the services of a roadside mechanic did not augur well for the trip. Fortunately the mechanic belonged to that rare breed of humanity that not only understand their limitations but are also content to operate within them. He stoutly resisted all blandishments on the grounds that his line was tractors and not dainty city run-abouts. Considering that his primary technical appliance appeared to be a large hammer of indeterminate vintage, I was in whole-hearted agreement with this assessment. Happily, Aasheesh's car, seemingly invigorated by this passage of arms, resumed its normal running and no further mechanical glitches were experienced for the rest of the trip.

The Anantgiri forest is spread across low, dry hills. The vegetation is dry deciduous on the exposed hill slopes, merging to moist mixed in the valley, with (introduced) elements of evergreen in the form of mango trees. The soil appears to be lateritic on the slopes and sandy in the valleys. The dry vegetation is characterised by trees like *Chloroxylon swietania*, *Lannea grandis*, and other unidentified species, generally leafless at this time of year. The moist mixed vegetation consisted of *Albizzia lebbek*, *Albizzia procera* (few), *Cassia fistula* (*amaltas* or Indian laburnum), tamarind or *imli*, *Ficus bengalensis* (banyan), *Tectona grandis* (teak - seemingly planted), *Erythrina* sp. (coral tree) with only a few flowers, a number of *Samanea saman* (the rain tree, which is introduced), *Pongamia pinnata* (*karanj*, also certainly planted), some *Azadirachta indica* (neem) and a species of large tree in a motley livery of young flush and bare patches identified by a local as USKAMAN, supporting much bird activity. *Madhuca indica* (mahua) is also well represented and at this time of year many sport the coppery hue of new foliage. The most striking feature of the vegetation on this trip was the spectacle of the extravagantly flowering *Bauhinia vahlii* vine, luxuriantly draped across huge sections of the canopy absolutely alive with birds, particularly sunbirds (*Nectarinia* sp.). The shrubbery was almost entirely composed of leafless *Lantana camarra* and *Zizyphus* sp. There was also a stand of young eucalyptus. Some other trees remained unidentified.

The general state of the forest is highly degraded with considerable pressure being exerted by fuel wood collectors and cattle, the bane of the Indian jungle. In spite of this the forest supports a reasonable diversity of bird species. Human manipulation of the habitat is significant in the form of introduced tree species, which often enhance the habitat in favour of some species of birds. Whether this manipulation has acted against other species is not known since we do not have records from the past with which to make a comparative analysis.

As we began our descent into the valley from the temple, attention was attracted to a large tree across from us, which was buzzing with birds. One warbler immediately attracted attention. Foraging busily through the fresh green of the new flush it looked larger than a leaf warbler *Phylloscopus* sp., with a heavier bill and, at first glance gave the impression of an *Acrocephalus* sp., warbler. However, careful inspection revealed greenish colour and an indistinct wing bar. The supercilium was long, pale and very distinct, stretching almost to the nape. Colour of bill was fleshy pink. It is difficult to distinguish the Largebilled leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* from the Greenish Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* in the field. Colouring and markings are similar. Distinguishing features are the relative sizes of the birds. The Handbook records this as the largest of our leaf warblers. Its winter habitat is shola and evergreen forest. However, these particular birds were possibly passage migrants. They were certainly favouring trees with dense foliage.

Another interesting warbler that was seen well and in reasonable numbers was the Large Crowned Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis*. This was mis-identified at first as the Blyth's Crowned Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus reguloides*. However, the Handbook states quite categorically that the latter does not winter in the south, while *P. occipitalis* does. That settles the argument. Since previous field trips to Anantgiri have not recorded this species, it is possible that these birds were passage migrants en route to their breeding grounds in the Himalayas.

Apart from these warblers, this tree locally called 'Uskaman (?)' hosted a large party of Oriental White-eyes *Zosterops palpebrosus*, Purplerumped Sunbirds *Nectarinia zeylonica* and Redvented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer*.

Hyder and Hatim first spotted the Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*. These turned out to be fairly common but are always good to see. One adult male in all its glory made a brief but stately appearance to the delight of Madhukar Reddy's son and nephew. It is an excellent bird for the initiation of novice birders. The White-browed Fantail Flycatchers *Rhipidura aureola* were first seen in a tamarind near the top of the steps along with a trio of Small Minivets *Pericroctus cinnamomeus*. However, as we descended into the valley it was the southern race of the White-throated Fantail Flycatcher *R.a. albogularis*, hunting low with their wider fantails, which were commoner. At one place 3 birds performed their mesmeric aerial ballet watched in fascinated delight at close quarters by us. On the whole we saw more White-throated Fantail Flycatchers than White-browed. The fact that most of our birdwatching was done in the valley perhaps explains this. It is interesting to compare the different hunting techniques of these two fantails and relate these to their morphology and preferred habitats. Of the 4 species of flycatchers seen, the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae* was the commonest.

Humayun spotted a single Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea* moving up a burnt slope. It would be interesting to see how spurfowl have fared in this degraded habitat.

Hyder also discovered the nest of a Crested Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* 30 feet above the ground, in a eucalyptus tree. At first the bird left the nest and perched about 150 yards away. Once it had satisfied itself that our intentions were peaceful it returned and it was obvious that it was incubating eggs.

In all habitats there are certain species of plants that act as 'Force Multipliers'. These are species whose presence dramatically boosts the carrying capacity of that habitat in terms both of diversity of species and absolute numbers. The two large banyan trees at the bottom of the valley, in full and abundant fruit, graphically illustrated this observation. They were full of birds and sounded, in the mixed metaphor of one wit, like an avian fish market. The frugivorous species came for the fruit and the insectivores for the insects attracted to the fruit. Perhaps the most abundant species were the White-eyes hunting through the dense foliage in their dozens. Coppersmiths *Megalaima haemacephala*, Redvented Bulbul, Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* and Grey Hornbills *Ocyceros birostris* were all present. A trio of Lesser Goldenbacked Woodpeckers *Dinopium benghalense* were there and a few Yellow-eyed Babblers *Chrysomma sinense* looking exotic amongst the bright green of the new leaves. The activity of the foragers and the frugivores flushed out many insects, creating a niche that was happily exploited by a busy foursome of Tickell's Blue Flycatchers and a young Paradise flycatcher male that had not yet achieved the milky hues of maturity.

A Jungle Nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus* was also heard calling quite close by and was spotted crouched on an almost horizontal branch of a small tree. As soon as we spotted it, the bird wriggled further into the crook of the branch but since we did not approach, it remained in good view. Another nightjar further up the hill answered its call.

Interestingly we saw no bee-eaters (Meropidae) despite the fact that one of the large rain trees was densely festooned with beehives. On the other hand we did see a termite mound that had been thoroughly demolished and a Sloth Bear *Melursus ursinus* could well have been responsible. Considering that its Latin name means 'honey bear' it would have an ample supply of honey! Unfortunately we forgot to enquire whether any bears were still reported from this forest.

The icing on the cake for some of us were a noisy pair of White-browed Bulbuls *Pycnonotus luteolus* in a mango tree and an Orange-headed Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanotus* (white-throated race), first spotted by Aasheesh, amongst the leaf litter. All in all this was a hot but productive trip with a total of 51 species seen and two young birdwatchers initiated.

Memberships which expired on 31-3-1998 should be renewed at the rates given below. The status of your membership is indicated on the address label of your envelope. An early renewal will help the Society. Membership in Rs: Life 1,000; Ordinary 100 p.a.; Student 25 p.a.; Corporate 2,000 (20 years); Foreign US $ 15 p.a.; Student membership up to 10th class. Payment should favour "Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh" and should be sent to the address at the end of this Bulletin.

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT (VS)

Rishi Valley
TAWNY EAGLE 4-6.2: 1 in flt; SPOTTED DOVE 4-6.2: POB, courting; HOOPOE 4-6.2: POB, hrd calls. 9-12.3: CB, 1 yng with ad.; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 4-6.2: fairly C.; BLACK-HEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE 9-12.3; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL 9-12.3 CB, 2 yng with ad.; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD 9-12.3: POB singing; PURPLE SUNBIRD 9-12.3: POB singing; SPOTTED MUNIA 4-6.2: CB, ad., with yng; WHITERUMPED MUNIA 4-6.2: CB, 2 juv., with ad.

Rishi Valley, Outskirts of 16.2
ASHYCROWNED FINCHLARK PRB, N nearing completion; LARGE GREY BABBLER hrd.

Ghattu Village 6.2
GREY HERON CB, 8 N on *Ficus* sp. tree.

Baiji Cheruvu 6.2
NIGHT HERON CB, several juv., & old N on *Acacia* sp. trees.

Pedda Tippa Samudram 6.2
WHITENECKED STORK 1; BARHEADED GOOSE 3.

Ranga Samudram 6.2
BLACK IBIS 2; PINTAIL 1691; COOT *c.* 1000.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park (MS, SAT)
GREY PARTRIDGE 4-11.4: CB, 3 imm.

Osmania Hospital, Hyderabad City 14.4 (MS, SAT)
ROSY PASTOR several.

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT 4.3 (HJ)

Mahbubnagar Town (near)
WHITE-EYED BUZZARD CB, a pair N.

NELLORE DISTRICT (VS)

Chennuru Tank 11.2
REDCRESTED POCHARD 285; COMMON POCHARD 110; TUFTED DUCK 480.

Gudur Tank 11.2
COMMON POCHARD 2410.

Kesavaram Tank 11.2
OPENBILL STORK 164 resting on trees in tank; WHITENECKED STORK 5.

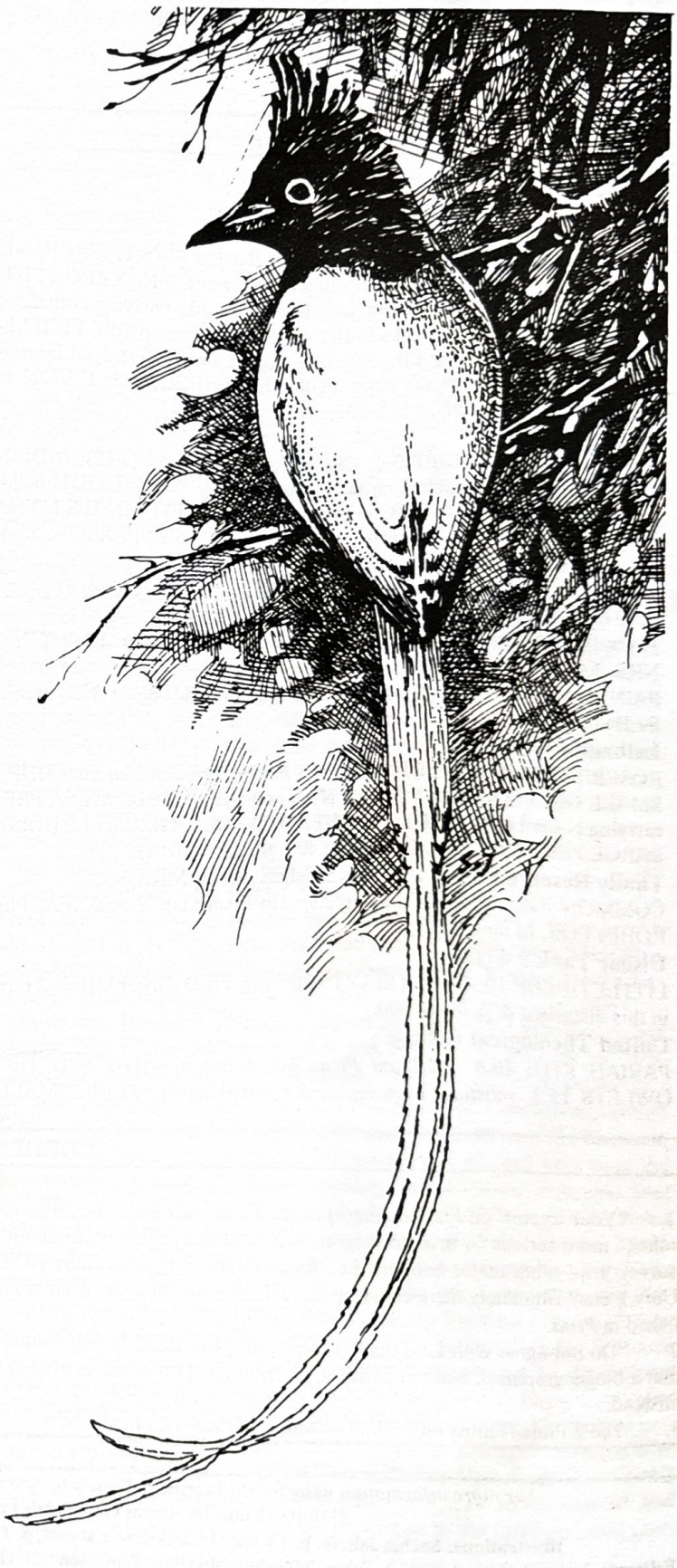
Nelapattu Pelicanry 1.3
GREY PELICAN CB, 200+ N with 2-3 yng each.; SHAG CB, good numbers with yng LITTLE CORMORANT CB, good numbers with yng; NIGHT HERON 100+, CB, several juv.; OPENBILL STORK 600+, CB, several juv; BLACKHEADED IBIS 150+, CB, juv.; COOT CB, 2-3 juv.

Pennaki Tank 11.2
PINTAIL 1000; REDCRESTED POCHARD 25; COMMON POCHARD 1100; COLLARED SAND MARTIN 100+ in flt.

Ragi Cheruvu 11.2
REDCRESTED POCHARD 6; COOT CB, 7-8 ad., with 3-4 yng.

Tada 28.2
SHAG CB, juv., on N tree; LITTLE CORMORANT CB, juv., on N tree; GREY HERON CB, juv., on N tree.

Vedurupattu
PAINTED STORK 11.2: CB, *c.* 200 incubating & with yng. N on vil., trees. 28.2: CB, 150+ yng hrd/seen at most N.; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 11.2: 1; WHISKERED TERN 11.2: 1490 in flt. Going to roost? COMMON MOORHEN 11.2: CB, ad., with 2 yng; COOT 11.2: CB, 2 ad with 7 yng; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER 11.2: CB, 1 yng following ad., on dry river bed; ASHYCROWNED FINCH-LARK 11 & 28.2: POB, disp.; SMALL SKYLARK POB, song/disp.; WHITETHROATED MUNIA 28.2: 2 entering N, late evening - roost?



RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Anantgiri, Vikarabad Mandal 19.4 (AP)
RED SPURFOWL 1; CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE CB, 1 N, 30' up eucalyptus tree, ad., incubating; YELLOWLEGGED GREEN PIGEON 1; JUNGLE NIGHTJAR 2; MAHRATTA WOODPECKER 1; BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER; BAYBACKED SHRIKE 1; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO; IORA POB, M in br., plm; WHITEBROWED BULBUL; RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER C; LARGE-BILLED LEAF WARBLER few; LARGE CROWNED LEAF WARBLER few; MAGPIE ROBIN POB, M in song; WHITE-THROATED GROUND THRUSH POB, in song.; YELLOWTHROATED SPARROW.

Jalpalli, near Gaganpahad (HJ)
REDHEADED MERLIN 21.3 CB, N on toddy palm, pair seen.

Kondapur (beyond Jubilee Hills) (HJ)
KESTREL 8.3: 1 F.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bannerghatta National Park (HS)
SMALL MINIVET 12.9.1997: CB, N with 2 eggs. 20.9.1997: CB, ad., feeding 2 chicks; 26.9.1997: 2 fledgeling (F) flew out of N.; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL 27.3 CB, ad., feeding yng. 12.4 PRB, ad., carrying N-mat., to another site between two rocks in the same area (same pair?); PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD 5.3: CB, N with 2 eggs. Later N destroyed by coucal, which probably ate the eggs; PURPLE SUNBIRD 5.3: CB, N in *Eresid* sp. spider's colony, ad., feeding yng.

Bangalore City
SMALL GREEN BARBET 3.4: CB, ad., carrying food (JNP); INDIAN MYNA 1.4: PRB, N building on telephone pole (JNP). 7.4: PRB, N building on electric pole. 15.4: PRB, on telephone pole (JNP).; JUNGLE MYNA 15.4: PRB, N building on peepal tree (JNP); HOUSE SPARROW 11.4: CB, N (FS). 13.4 PRB, mating (SK).

Kaggalipura: Ramaiah Farm 12.4 (JNP)
JUNGLE CROW CB, N.

Karadikal State Forest (Bannerghatta NP range) 10.4: (JNP, NRS, MBK, MRR)
PAINTED SANDGROUSE 1 F, on road-side in scrub forest. New record for Bangalore.

Lalbagh 12.4
ROSERINGED PARAKEET feeding on *Parkia biglandulosa* pods (JNP); SMALL GREEN BARBET PRB, 2 N on rain tree; JUNGLE MYNA PRB, carrying N-matl (JNP,UHK); BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH 1 F (NRS); LARGE PIED WAGTAIL CB, 2 imm & 1 ad., (JNP,UHK).

Thally Reserve Forest 10.4 (NRS, MBK, NRS, MRR)
COMMON IORA PRB, M singing/disp., to F carrying N-matl; MAGPIE ROBIN POB, M singing.

Ulsoor Tank 9.4 (DJ)
LITTLE GREBE 10; CORMORANTS 20+ sp?; PIED KINGFISHER 2 rare in this disturbed & polluted tank.

United Theological College
PARIAH KITE 10.4: POB, on *Ficus benjamina* tree (DJ); SPOTTED OWLETS 15.3: roosting, have replaced collared scops owl (?); SMALL GREEN BARBET 19.4: CB, N on gulmohur tree, ad., carrying food (DJ); INDIAN MYNA possible nesting; JUNGLE MYNA CB, 2 N. Ad., carrying food (DJ,JNP); MAGPIE ROBIN 12.4: PRB, F carrying N-matl, M singing (ORK);

Yedamadu village 27.3-3.4 (HS)
MAGPIE ROBIN CB, N 10' up a papaya tree in chikkoo orchard with 2 yng & 2 unhatched eggs. 2 yng fledged out successfully.

TAMIL NADU

CHENNAI DISTRICT (VS)

Adyar Estuary & Theosophical Society 1.2
EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER 500; BLACKWINGED STILT 2480; TEREK SANDPIPER 1; LARGE EGRET 16; SMALL GREEN BITTERN 1; GARGANEY 132.

Guindy National Park
PAINTED STORK 8.3: CB, 1 N on net of aviary in Children's Park.; REDWINGED CRESTED CUCKOO 8.2: 1; COPPERSMITH 8.3: CB, carrying *Ficus* sp. fruit to N hole; TREE PIE 8.3: PRB, N under const.; BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER 8.2: 1-2 hrd; PARADISE FLY-CATCHER 8.2: 1 M; MAGPIE-ROBIN 8.2: POB, in song; FOREST WAGTAIL 8.2: 2-3; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD 8.3: POB, in song/disp.

Santhome, Chennai
COMMON SWALLOW 5.3: several seen flying northward in mid March. Very few to none by end March. PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD 5.3: CB, yng being fed by ad.; HOUSE SPARROW 24.2: CB, ad., feeding yng at N.

DHARMAPURI DISTRICT 10.4 (NRS, JNP, MBK, MRR)

Thally Tank
DABCHICK POB, in br., plm; POND HERON & CATTLE EGRET POB, in br., plm; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL; INDIAN MOORHEN 10; COOT 296 CB, several imm; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 5; COMMON SANDPIPER 1; COPPERSMITH CB, ad., carrying food.

Dharmapuri District: enroute to Thally Village
PARIAH KITE CB, N; BROWN SHRIKE; MAGPIE ROBIN POB, M singing.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP), Devcharan Jathanna (DJ), Feroza Sinha (FS), Hyder Jaffer (HJ), H Satish (HS), JN Prasad (JNP), MB Krishna (MBK), MR Raghavendra (MRR), M Shafaatulla (MS), NR Swamy (NRS), Oscar Ravi Kiran (ORK), SA Taher (SAT), S Karthikeyan (SK), U Harish Kumar (UHK), V Santharam (VS).

ERRATA: *Pitta* # 84, April 1998, p. 3: Under *Birding Notes*, after 'Medak District', the date - "1.3" is missing.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

CORRESPONDENCE

1. "Your 'report' on Field outing(s) is great and each issue should carry this. Groups could be 'halved', one $^1/_2$ 'bird-fancying' and 'enjoying' birds, the other, more serious $^1/_2$ inventorying each habitat thoroughly each month and so updating BSAP's database. Besides waterbodies, it would be useful to survey/'trip' other major habitats, i.e., forest (Narsapur), agriculture (ICRISAT), aquatic (Manjira), stony scrub (Golconda Fort area?), urban (Osmania Univ.), etc.? Ultimately there could be more than one destination each month and results could be reported in the Indoor Meeting and then okayed and published in *Pitta*.

2. "Do not agree with Lavkumar's 'regional' plea. BSAP's target must be the Deccan Plateau, primarily, and peninsular India generally. I still believe that a biogeographical, and not political, distributional approach is needed now. District or State avifaunas have absolutely no scientific basis and can only mislead.

3. "The 2 Pintails must be feeding in water that was rich in *IRON*." - Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé

For Private Circulation Only

For more information write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034. India.
Editors' Note: Dr Kumar Ghorpade's Letter will be published in the next issue of *Pitta*.
Illustrations: Sachin Jaltare: p. 1 Crested Hawk-Eagle at nest; p. 3 male Paradise Flycatcher. Shrikant W. Kolhe: p. 2 Banyan tree (Icrisat).
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj A Taher. **Membership** (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 86 : June 1998

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 21-06-1998, 7.30 a.m.: Chilkur Deer Park: We request members with personal transport, willing to accommodate people, to volunteer to the Hon. Secretary and make the trip a success. We meet inside, near the huts.

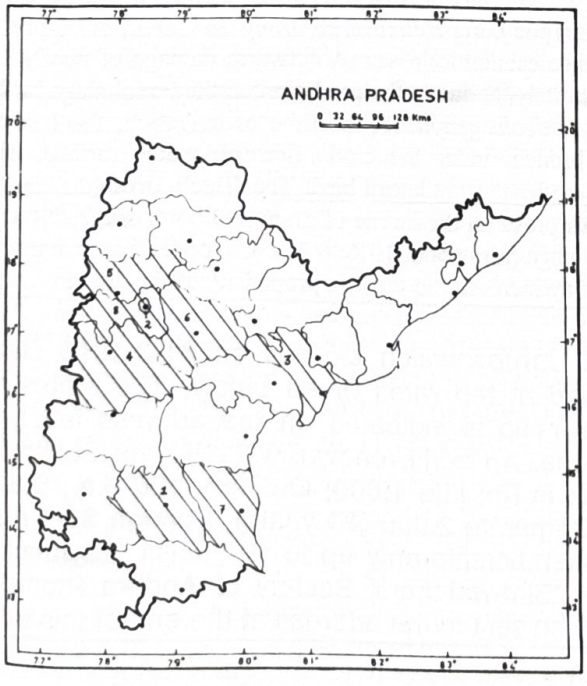
INDOOR MEETING: 15-06-1998, 6 p.m.: "Birds of Zimbabwe," a talk by Humayun Taher. Vidyaranya High School, Opposite Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

The **Asian Waterfowl Census** conducted by the members of the BSAP, AP Forest Department and other birdwatchers of the state early this year, was quite a success. A gist of the data is given below. 23 participants (whose forms reached the coordinator) counted a total of 3,32,396 waterfowl at 26 sites, in 8 districts of Andhra Pradesh, representing 59 species.

BIRD GROUPS	NUMBERS
Grebes	1,435
Pelicans*	390
Cormorants & Darters	15,146
Herons & Egrets	48,451
Storks	30,945
Ibises & Spoonbills	4,331
Flamingos	12,325
Geese & Ducks	1,86,883
Cranes	---
Rails, Gallinules, Coots	16,397
Finfoots & Jacanas	808
Shorebirds	13,115
Gulls & Terns	2,170

* The pelicanry at Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary was not counted this year, hence the number of pelicans is very few. A December 1997 report mentions of 400+ nesting birds present there.



Districts covered in Andhra Pradesh during the AWC 1998

S. No.	District	No. of Sites
1	Cuddapah	1
2	Hyderabad	1
3	Krishna	2
4	Mahbubnagar	1
5	Medak	2
6	Nalgonda	1
7	Nellore	13
8	Rangareddi	5

22 March 1998 was a warm and sunny morning. Mr Qamar Mohammed Khan, DFO Medak, was waiting at the Panjagutta cross-roads. Membes kept trickling in and we finally left at 8.30 a.m. for a day's birding to **Manjira Reservoir** which we reached around 10 a.m. A quick cup of tea and we all trooped to the back of the Environment Centre to see the feeding of crocodiles. It was fascinating to watch the seemingly quiet and docile creatures suddenly erupt into action the moment they saw the keeper bringing in the bucket of meat. After the thrill and some photography, we went towards the lower barrage to go to the temporary boat jetty. The original jetty was dry all round as there was little water in the reservoir and we could not walk along the barrage as there were two huge bee-hives above the gates! Despite all the care and detour, it was slippery on the mossy stones and we were all fortunate to get to the other side except for Moorty and Walter, who slipped but got up smiling! Looking down the river (stream would be more appropriate!) we spotted 12 Brahminy Duck and a couple of Spotbills. The usual Pond Herons, Cattle and Little Egrets were also there and a few Pariah Kites circled above. While a Pied Kingfisher was hovering above for its breakfast of "fish-n-fish", two Little Cormorants were sunning on the rocks. Somebody spotted a Large Cormorant on a projection over the barrage gate and there were 2 Bluetailed Bee-Eaters, probably feasting on the occupants of the hives. Swallows weren't far behind and 2 species, Common and Wiretailed, were seen flying around along with Dusky Crag Martins, in a separate flock. By now the boatman, Mallesh, was ready with the boat, life-jackets and all, and very soon the boat was full of excited members looking forward to an enjoyable boat ride. There was excitement all around when they returned (no problems with the boat though) - for the birds sighted. Openbill and Painted Storks an also the Whitenecked. While one was delighted having seen the White Ibis, another was excited about having seen the Purple Moorhen, the Purple Heron and the Grey Heron. This geared up the next group and they piled into the boat. They returned after an hour, no less ecstatic. Someone spotted a nightjar on a branch but the species could not be determined. Night Herons in fair numbers and a lot of abandoned Baya nests were seen. So was a Cotton Teal. Meanwhile, Qamar Mohammed, another person and I were sitting on the bund, under a shade, and were rewarded with the sighting of a Brahminy Kite, an Osprey, a lone Demoiselle Crane and 2 Kestrels. To twist a famous poetic line, 'they also serve, who sit and watch'. It was getting rather hot as we returned to the Environmental Cen-

tre. A wash, lunch and then a film on Manjira (Telugu commentary). When notes were compared, the tally of species stood at 52. Next day we read that the mercury stood at 42^{0}C on that wonderful Sunday! - Siraj A Taher.

A letter from Taej Mundkur, Coordinator, Waterbird Conservation Programme of Wetlands International (based at Malaysia), brings some mixed news. The good news first! "I am pleased to inform you that the **Asian Waterfowl Census 1994-96 report** is finally printed.... The report will be mailed out directly from the printers in Bangalore, India, to coordinators and participants of the 1994, 1995 and 1996 census within the next week or so." So, all those of you who have taken part in this census, will finally receive the long awaited report! The bad news is, "Compared to other parts of the world, Asia is quoted as having the highest percentage (%) of decreasing populations, lowest % of stable populations and the lowest % of populations with known trends (along with Oceania). This should be an incentive for all of us to work together to improve the information on the conservation status of these birds."

"The **Wildlife Institute of India** has begun a project concerning the ecology of the **Sarus Cranes**. It will look into the aspect of land use change within the range of the species and determine if this has had any effects on the behaviour and ecology of the Cranes. This is especially pertinent since several surveys indicate that the population of this majestic bird has plummeted to very low numbers in the past years. In this matter, we would appreciate your help. We are compiling a data base of all sightings of the Sarus Crane since 1995 from anyone who has done any birdwatching and noted down the presence of the species. The data will be of immense use and we would like to have the location of sighting, site description, number of birds sighted and any other information that will be of use in the project. The information will be duly acknowledged in all reports and publications." Questionnaires are available with B C Choudhury, Scientist, Wildlife Institute of India, Post Box # 18, Chandrabani, Dehradun 248001.

"The famous expert on Sri Lankan avifauna," Layard, "described the first specimen of the flycatcher (now popularly called **Layard's flycatcher** ***Muscicapa muttui***) in 1854 in the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* series 2, 13(74): 127. After the usual scientific account on the bird, Layard writes: "I name this new species after my old and attached servant Muttu, to whose patient perseverance and hunting skill I owe so many of my best birds. This one he brought in one morning at Pt. Pedro in the month of June..." This article was from a series of papers Layard authored in the aforementioned journal in 1853-54 entitled *Notes on the Ornithology of Ceylon, collected during an eight years' residence in the island.* [R Kannan in *Hornbill* 1996, No. 2: 9.]

That wild birds can be as fearless of humans, as is described below, seems impossible. But it is true on some islands of the **Galapagos** archipelago.

"The finches are much more afraid of hawks and owls than they are of us," **Peter Grant** tells friends in Princeton. "When we walk up to them, the birds keep doing what they are doing; but when an owl comes near, they head for a cactus tree. A little while ago Rosemary was crossing a treeless spot. An owl flew over, and finches flew up from all around and landed on Rosemary!

"They are always perching on our shoulders, our arms, our heads. Sometimes when I am measuring one, a few others land up and down my wrists and arms to watch. I was looking out to sea with binoculars once, and a hawk handed on my hat. We have a picture of it."

"Or you pick up a bamboo pole, set it over your shoulder, and begin to carry it," says Rosemary. "Suddenly the pole is very heavy. Then you turn around and see that you have a hawk hitching a ride on the back of it."

"I used to have a wart on my back, although it is gone now," says Peter. "A small black wart, up near the right shoulder. I went around in just shorts in those days, and on Genovesa (one of the islands), finches would peck at the wart."

"What a difference!" says one veteran of the finch watch, Dolph Schluter. "In Kenya, finches flush as much as 30 meters away. In the Galapagos, the birds land on the rim of your coffee cup. If there's only a little coffee left in there, they will land right inside it and take a sip. You can put your hand over it, and measure the bird. Mockingbirds on Genovesa would pick at our shoelaces. On the really isolated islands like Wolf, you could catch the birds by hand. Just reach out your hand and grab them."

Peter, camping in Shiraz, had once spotted a pair of nuthatches feeding near a rock. He put a few nuts on the rock, and hid himself, hoping to observe the birds' beaks and feeding behavior at close range. Although he waited three hours, the birds did not come back. ("It would be better to use caged birds, " Peter noted tersely in his report.) But on Daphne the most famous beaks in the world were tapping him on the shoulder. He had **Darwin**'s finches perching on his knee, studying him. [Weiner, Jonathan (1995): The Beak of the Finch: Evolution in Real Time. Vintage.]

"A suggestion of interest to foresters has been made that a greater variety of trees in the **plantations** would provide additional food in winter for those birds best able to control or at least stabilise insect populations. Tits in winter take an appreciable proportion of the invertebrate population and one can calculate that each bird examines 1,100 trees every day and needs 5 mg. or the equivalent of 24 average-sized insects every minute of the day to keep itself alive. Coal and willow tits store food in autumn, but this forms only a very small part of their diet. In mid-winter coal tits have to feed for about 90% of a nine-hour day. On the principle that the smaller the species the longer the time required each day for feeding, goldcrests must feed for nearly 100% of the time.....

"These areas (orchards) represent an important ecotone for birds, but their importance will be affected by whether the orchards have herbage only beneath the trees, or fruit bushes or ploughed land, as well as by the age and treatment of the fruit trees. Orchards are sometimes turned into unstable communities by man's interference with the ecological balance. Although it may be tempting to overestimate the value of birds in controlling pests, a serious break in the ecological chain at the lower levels may render the trees more liable to attack by insect pests. Invasions most often come to cultivated land or to land greatly modified by man's multifarious practices. **Orchards** are therefore extremely valuable for ecological studies since man's economic needs are also involved." [Simms, Eric (1990): Woodland Birds. Bloomsbury Books, London.]

A recent study [Malik, Y.P. (1998): Birds: An eco-friendly approach for insect-pests management in Linseed. *Insect Environment* 3(4): 104.] brings to light some positive aspects of **economic ornithology**. "Linseed *Linum usitatissimum* L. has a number of insect-pests among which Cutworm *Agrotis ipsilon* Hfn., at the seedling stage and gram pod borer *Helicoverpa armigera* Hubn., at capsule formation, cause economic losses. A cutworm damage of nearly 20% was reduced to 5-7% due to the predation on the larval stage by the **Pond Heron** *Ardeola grayii*. At the time of irrigation, the larvae of cutworm hidden under the clods float on water surface, which are picked-up by the predatory bird. The **Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus* preys on the larvae of gram pod borer and reduced the capsule damage from about 10% to 3-5%. Wooden/bamboo pegs used as perch may increase the feeding propensity of the drongo.

Memberships which expired on 31-3-1998 should be renewed at the rates given below. The status of your membership is indicated on the address label of your envelope. An early renewal will help the Society. Membership in Rs: Life 1,000; Ordinary 100 p.a.; Student 25 p.a.; Corporate 2,000 (20 years); Foreign $ 15 p.a.; Student membership only up to 10th class. Payment should favour "Bird-watchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh" and should be sent to the address at the end of this Bulletin.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—16

"A bird is different from an aeroplane, although both fly through the air."(p. 9)
".... if our brains were to work like traditional computers it would take us about two days to get dressed, a week to make breakfast and a week to get to work." (p. 12)
"The mind can see only what it is prepared to see." (p. 17)
".... 'intelligence' [which is gene-based—K.G.] is the potential of the mind and the way this is put into operation is thinking skill." (p. 16)
"The relationship between intelligence and thinking is similar to that between a car and the driver."(p. 19)
"We need to shift from cleverness to wisdom. Perception is the basis of wisdom." (p. 27)
"Aristotle said that all new knowledge comes from existing knowledge." (p. 181)
"I looked out across the valley at the beginning of the Alps. I noticed a hawk circling overhead. For twenty minutes the hawk glided without once flapping its wings. The hawk knew the system perfectly and moved from on thermal up-draught to another. Human para-gliders descended to the valley floor in just two minutes. Knowing the system makes a difference." (p. 51) (Edward de Bono, 1990, *I Am Right—You Are Wrong*. From this to the New Renaissance: From Rock Logic to Water Logic. xx+293 pp., Penguin Books, Delhi)

Five hundred years ago, this very month, a Portuguese voyager Vasco da Gamma (see Letter 9, *Pitta* # 77, Sept. 1997) sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and 'discovered' India for the Europeans. I believe this initiated a kind of Renaissance—the re-birth of learning—in our sub-continent, when paper making (which the Chinese taught the Arabs and they the Europeans) and printing introduced by Europeans revolutionized our life-style and our thinking. This Letter is an unstinted *encomium* of this great navigator, discoverer, and of his landing at Calicut (*Kozhikode* in native tongue) in May 1498, and what followed from Europe as a 'fall out' of this achievement.

On October 7, 1967 a dear school-mate of mine, who was one of my early companions on 'bird walks', presented me with a book I treasure to this day. This was James Fisher's *A History of Birds* (1954, Hutchinson's University Library, London, 208 pp.), one of the many 'Fisherian' literary masterpieces that conditioned my ornithological upbringing in the days of The Beatles, of a richer, more tasteful, Hindostani Cinema and of my heroes playing Test Cricket. Fisher wrote that "the first printed book on animals was published before 20th July, 1467 in Strasburg (an edition of the *Sermonum Proprietate* of Rabanus Maurus)", and went on to elaborate that "If example be needed of the impact of the Age of Print and Science upon the world, the transformation of the list of recorded British birds in the sixteenth century is a good one, for it was nearly doubled, rising, as I have it in my collection of names, from eighty to 138 [some 450 species have now been recorded from Great Britain and Ireland—K.G.]. More than half the fifty-eight 'new' birds were contributed by William Turner [1500-1568], the father of British ornithology, whose *Avium Praecipuarum* was published in Cologne in 1544, the first printed bird book...." Another Fisherian masterpiece, in collaboration with the painting skill of Roger Tory Peterson, that I acquired in the 1960s, was their magnificent *The World of Birds*: A comprehensive guide to general ornithology (1964, Macdonald & Co., London, 288 pp.).

The philosophical quotations above are taken from a book I found lying around in my Desktop Printer's office, on a day I had to wait my turn at their computers. The opportunity that availed itself was seized and I spent much of the next hour speed-reading and making notes from this very interesting book by Edward de Bono. He feels the time is now right for a 'New Renaissance', which will lift us from a rigid 'Rock Logic' to a free flowing 'Water Logic'. He writes that the last renaissance was clearly based on the rediscovery of ancient Greek thinking habits (about 400 BC) of logic, reason, argument, truth and the importance of man. Before this, our thinking was based on dogma and theology. Feudalism, the shameless exploitation of the peasantry, was getting out of date, and the renaissance brought in a reformation which was a revolt against the Roman Church. It also triggered a revolution, a political struggle of the *bourgeoisie* ('middle class') to control the power of the kings who ruled them. De Bono thinks that a new renaissance will supplant the 24 centuries-old logic of reason with the intelligence of perception. I also believe we are now ready for just such a new renaissance, to be ushered in with perception and wisdom, taking utmost care to *select* only what we really need and can absorb and digest, and rejecting most of the 'hi-tech, hi-life' carrots that the developed 'West' is dangling before us. We developing countries (mostly tropical) cannot afford their urban lifestyle; their fighting the cold there with excessive burning of fuel, gas, electrical and atomic energy.

Readers may wonder what I am doing with a letter meant for bird watchers. Let me explain. Like there is no Science without Philosophy (a Ph.D. is a degree in Philosophy!), there really can be no effective bird watching by itself without awareness of history (natural and human), geography, art, culture, *etc*. We are now in a Information Age but, no computer can ever match the human brain (or even 'animal instinct'). We must be careful (1) not to get bamboozled by this overflow of available data on CD-Roms or Internet Websites and (2) in learning quickly the means to *select* and summarize the 'grain from the chaff' of this information explosion.

Coming back to Calicut and the hopeful renaissance of ornithological research in South Asia, two scientists at the National Research Centre for Spices (for whose trade Europeans came to India; though the real 'Spice Islands" are the Moluccas of present Indonesia) have written on bird-flowers noticed in this historical coastal city and at Peruvannamuzhi in the Wynaad. Devasahayam & Rema (1994, *NLBW* 33: 103-105) wrote of 16 plant species whose flowers were visited by birds in Kerala, of which 5 species were additions to the 93 flowering plants listed by Subramanya & Radhamani, visited by 58 bird species (These numbers do not even cover 1% of our plant species and just over 4% of our bird species!). They also observed a maximum of bird visitors on flowers of *Bombax ceiba* Linnaeus (Bombacaceae) and on *Erythrina variegata* L. var. *orientalis* Merrill (Fabaceae), but I have not seen the publications in which these have been "reported elsewhere". Another scientist, a lady, has also researched on nectar-feeding birds and avian pollinators of parasitic mistletoes (lLoranthaceae) (see Priya Davidar, 1985, *J.B.N.H.S.* 82: 45-60). P. Kannan submitted a M.Sc. thesis on Ornithophily to the University of Bombay in 1966, dealing with flowerbirds around Bombay, but I am not aware of this paper being published, though one on "Nectar-feeding adaptations of Flowerbirds" appeared in the *J.B.N.H.S.* (75: 1036-1050) in 1980. The BIBLIOGRAPHIC INDEX (1995) compiled by Aasheesh Pittie is unfortunately of little help, as I had pointed out (1996, *NLBW* 36: 74-77), in obtaining most published works on subjects like Pollination by birds, or Food of birds, which latter will be the topic of a forthcoming Letter.

— Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé

[Errata in Letter # 15 -- Line 9 from bottom of p. 2 should read "There is no doubt that Berlin", and Line 3 of last paragraph should read "coffee+cardamom—planted wooded area".]

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Rishi Valley (SR) 11.3

LITTLE EGRET POB, 3 in br., plm; COLLARED SCOPS OWL 1; MOTTLED WOOD OWL 1; GREY DRONGO 2; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1 F; WHITETHROATED GROUND THRUSH 1; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL CB, 2 ad., 2 yng.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills

SPOTTED DOVE 9.5: CB, N with 3 eggs in bougainvillea, 1 laid on consequtive days. 11.5: N destroyed by strong wind. 13.5 PRB, pair const., N in same place (SAT); PLAINTIVE CUCKOO 25.4: 1 F, hepatic phase. Hawking insects like flycatchers, from top of tree (AP); BLACKNAPED BLUE FLYCATCHER 22.4: 1 F hunting inside canopy of fruiting mango tree (AP).

Hyderabad City (HJ)

SHIKRA 2.3: Sunning on ground.; REDHEADED MERLIN 6.5: 1 at Imliban Bus Stand (Central bus stand).

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore City

BRAHMINY KITE 29.4: 1 imm., N destroyed by heavy rain on 25.4, United Theological College (JNP); SCAVENGER VULTURE 12.2: 2, St. Joseph's College (JNP); SMALL GREEN BARBET 29.4: POB, United Theological College (DJ); INDIAN MYNA 29.4: POB, 1 N (JNP); JUNGLE MYNA 29.4: POB, 4 N (JNP); BLACK HEADED CUCKOO SHRIKE 29.4: United Theological College (JNP); MAGPIE ROBIN 9.5: CB, N in N-box, Sadashivnagar (FS); GREY TIT 21.4.2 inspecting N-box (JNP).

Kadugodi/Whitefield Area (KVS)

PARIAH KITE 17.4: CB, N with 1 nestling; REDWATTLED LAPWING 14.4: CB, N with 4 eggs, incubating; SPOTTED OWLET 30.4; WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER 29.4: CB, ad., feeding nestlings; ROLLER 16.4: CB, ad., feeding nestlings; HOOPOE 17.4: CB, ad., feeding 2 yng., outside N; CRIMSONBREASTED BARBET 17.4: CB, incubating; SMALL GREEN BARBET 16.4: CB, ad., feeding nestlings; SINGING BUSH LARK 20.4: CB, N with 4 nestlings fed by ad.; WIRETAILED SWALLOW 26.4: CB; N const.; REDRUMPED SWALLOW 20.4: PRB, N const.; BLACK DRONGO 18.4: CB, incubating; INDIAN MYNA 18.4: N bldg; JUNGLE MYNA 18.4: N bldg; TREE PIE 17.4: CB, incubating; JUNGLE CROW 26.4: CB, incubating; WHITEBROWED BULBUL 18.4: CB, N with 1 egg & 1 nestling. Ad., feeding yng; INDIAN ROBIN 22.4 CB, N with 1 nestling & 2 eggs, ad., incubating; PADDYFIELD PIPIT 26.4: CB, 1 N with 2 eggs, ad., incubating; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL 26.4: CB, ad., feeding yng; HOUSE SPARROW 15.4: POB, incubating; WHITETHROAT-ED MUNIA 14.4 CB, N with 7 eggs, incubating.

Indiranagar (VK)

HOOPOE 5.4: (becoming very rare in Bangalore) National Institute of Advanced Studies; SMALL GREEN BARBET 16.4: CB, ad., feeding fledgling with Singapore Cherry.

Sadashivnagar (AmP)

NIGHT HERON 1.5: CB, 15 with imm., at heronry nearer Sankey Tank. Many const., N.; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 golf course.

Vasanthnagar (RK,JH,C,JNP)

Magpie Robin 26.4: POB, M Singing & frequently visiting a chimney pipe.

Badamanavarthe State Forest/Valley School 10.5

BLACKHEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE tail moulting (JNP); BLACK DRONGO PRB, ad., carrying N-matl (MRR); PURPLE SUNBIRD CB, F feeding 2 yng in N in Eresid spiders colony *c.* 3' from ground (JG)

KOLAR DISTRICT

LESSER PIED KINGFISHER 3.4 11 on a wire (VK).

MANDYA DISTRICT 29.3 (PCG, DK)

Kokrebellur Bird Sanctuary

GREY PELICAN 13 orphaned/injured nestlings saved at Kokrebellur pelican pen by volunteers of Hejjarle Balaga (Pelican Conservation Group).

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Pittie (AP); Chaitanya (C); D Jathanna (DJ); D Karan (DK); J Griffes (JG); J Hemanth (JH); JN Prasad (JNP); H Jaffer (HJ); KV Srinivas (KVS); MR Raghavendra (MRR); Pelican Conservation Group (PCG); Rajkumar (RK); SA Taher (SAT); S Riyazuddin (SR); Vijay Kiyawat (VK).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

OBITUARY

Dr. Charles G. Sibley: Born 7 August 1917, Fresno, California, died 12 April 1998, Santa Rosa, California. During his lifetime, Dr. Sibley held many eminent teaching and administrative posts in famous American universities and bird-related organizations. Among these are the Universities of California, Kansas, Yale, Cornell and San Francisco. He was a member of ca. 15 scientific societies, U.S. and foreign; Fellow, Honorary or Corresponding Fellow of Seven; officer or council member of five - 1946-present. He was a Guggenheim Fellow, 1959-60; Treasurer, American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), 1953-62; President, AOU, 1986-88; Secretary-General of the 13th International Ornithological Congress (IOC), 1958-62 and President of the 20th IOC, 1986-1990. Besides this he was on the editorial boards of many technical journals. His publications since 1939 include 132 titles, of which 77 pertain to molecular systematics and evolution. But his most lasting and important contribution to the ornithological world were the three books he co-authored, dealing with the DNA-based classification of birds.

"Phylogeny and Classification of Birds" (with Jon Ahlquist). Yale Univ. Press. 1990.
"Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World" (with Burt Monroe). Yale Univ. Press. 1990.
"A World Checklist of Birds" (with Burt Monroe). Yale Univ. Press. 1993.

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For more information write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034. India.
Errata: The note on BSAP's Anantagiri trip (*Pitta* # 85, May 1998, p. 1) was written by Hashim Tyabji.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj A Taher. **Membership** (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh **No. 87 : July 1998**

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 12-07-1998, 7.30 a.m.: Kasu Brahmanand Reddy National Park (Chiran Palace): This will be a half day trip. We meet at the main gate near L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad. Bring rainwear if necessary.

INDOOR MEETING: 20-07-1998, 6 p.m.: "Wildlife in Andhra Pradesh," a talk by Pranay Waghray. Vidyaranya High School, Opposite Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

FIELD TRIP TO **CHILKUR DEER PARK**: 21 JUNE 1998

Humayun Taher

After a night long drizzle on Saturday, the morning of 21 June 1998 promised to be a wonderful day, cloudy and cool. Members who turned up tentatively for the field trip, apprehensive of rain, were not disappointed.

As they gathered near the cottages in the park, members were greeted by a murder of House Crows, who were at work with a few Pariah Kites on a gastronomic orgy by the gate. While we watched their frenzied activities, we heard Grey Partridge and Peafowl calling from the bush. A Shikra and its 2 young flew around, calling loudly, much to the chagrin of the crows, who dive-bombed them.

Now we decided to make our way to the observation post on the top of a hillock nearby. From this vantage point we saw a few Spotted Deer *Axis axis*. A few hundred yards away, there were three male peafowl standing on a rocky outcrop, calling loudly. They were in full breeding plumage, i.e., train and crest, and at least one was actively displaying. We also saw and heard Rufousbellied Babbler and Crow Pheasant from the observation point.

It was decided to follow what is called the 'ring road', i.e., a dirt track that circles the park. So we set off. The vegetation was full of sounds. Trills, cheeps and squeaks, the sources of which seemed strangely retiring! However, we persevered and were rewarded by sightings of both Purple and Purplerumped Sunbirds, Jungle and Franklin's Wren-Warblers, Koel, Yelloweyed, Large Grey and Whiteheaded Babblers and Small Minivets. A pair of Pied Crested Cuckoos flew overhead and we heard the Common Hawk Cuckoo. We did see a few 'little brown jobs' (lbj), but these did not deign us the honour of their identity. At one point Tom Hash pointed out an Indian Chameleon *Chamaeleon zeylanicus*, which immediately became a subject of immortality in the shape of photographs. Delighted at having at last found a subject that was incapable of disappearing before he had a chance of setting up his camera, Tom took his time in fitting on lenses and checking all his esoteric devices. Meanwhile, the chameleon, with a long-suffering air, making the best of a bad job, just sat there and regarded us in horror. Having photographed it, we pushed on.

One of us saw a small unidentified ground bird scuttling about in the bushes and decided that this warranted further investigation. Proceeding a few yards into the bush, a strange buzzing sound, coming from a thoroughly agitated beehive convinced him that discretion was the better part of valor! Small birds on the ground were not that important after all! A little distance away we found signs of Indian Porcupine *Hystrix indica* in the shape of pug marks and a few dropped quills—the cause of man-eating in Tigers *Panthera tigris*, if we are to believe Jim Corbett and Kenneth Anderson. We also found evidence of Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* as shown by holes dug in the ground in their search for tubers, *etc*., and hoof marks.

The list of birds seen on this trip, although not a large one, was decent and the weather, wonderful. The members, particularly the younger set, enjoyed themselves hugely and were fascinated by the little Scarlet Velvet Mites that littered the path thickly, following the rain of the previous night. All in all we had a good time and saw some 27 species of birds and three species of mammals. Sambhar *Cervus unicolor*, spotted deer and Blacknaped Hare *Lepus nigricollis*.

On May 10th this year, while visiting **Harike** in India's western **Punjab**, Per Undeland and Harkirat Singh Sangha discovered a **Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*** on some wet fields at the eastern edge of the wetlands. With the migration well under way there were many waders using this important Indian Ramsar site as a stopover on their way north. Per reports that there were good numbers of Temminck's and Little Stints as well as Curlew Sandpipers in the same area but the Pectoral Sandpiper was associating mostly with Wood Sandpipers. He and Harkirat were able to observe the bird for an hour on the 10th and again on the following day. He intends to write up the observation for publication, as this appears to be the first record for the Indian Subcontinent.

The occurrence of Pectoral Sandpiper in South Asia is not entirely unexpected as it is a long-distance migrant from its breeding grounds in the Arctic tundra to its main wintering area in South America. Some also regularly winter in Australia and New Zealand. Such long-distance migrants are, of course, well-known for their vagrancy and a number of birds are recorded each year in Europe. However, there appear to be relatively few Asian records away from its breeding area: almost annual on passage in April in Hong Kong; four spring passage records from China (Paul Holt pers. comm.); scarce annually on autumn passage in Japan; in the Middle East only a handful of records from Israel; to the best of my knowledge not recorded at all in SE Asia.

[Krys Kazmierczak <krys@compuserve.com> on NatHist S Asia Group <nathistory-india@lists.princeton.edu>]

On May 28 there was some great news from George Archibald of the International Crane Foundation and Dr. Sasha Sorokin, the Coordinator of the Conservation Program for Siberian Cranes in Russia. The lone pair of **Siberian Cranes** that winters in **Keoladeo National Park** has safely returned to their nesting grounds near the Kunovat River in western Russia.

.....continued on page 4.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST□□17

"A taxonomist says he describes a species, but I am aware, and I believe that the average describer is also aware, that what he is describing is a species-concept to the best of his ability with the material he has available. It is impossible to describe a species unless the totality of the species, all individuals of it, are available.

"Any taxonomist who believes in evolution must reject the idea of cataclysmic change, either in evolution of species or in human cultural development.

"Although the still undescribed species in many cases will be those that are naturally rare or found in remote or very specialized habitats, many, especially those segregated from old species, may be found by making better use of the material already in museums. Often, additional material pertaining to a species described from unique or very few specimens could easily have been secured by a request that curators and specialists look for it among their material of the old species or very similar species." [George C. Steyskal, 1967, *Syst. Zool.*, 16: 266-267]

Three months ago, *Pitta* had a concise summary, of a *Business Standard* news item, by Siraj Taher (*Pitta* # 84, April 1998) informing us of Rajat Bhargava's re-discovery of Rothschild's Parakeet (561 – *Psittacula intermedia* Rothschild) around Dehra Dun and Naini Tal. If the species was identified correctly, this is the first ever sighting, and recognition, of this enigmatic species, *in the wild*. It has been fairly conclusively proven to be a good species and not a hybrid of any combination of the following four closely related species (# 557-563): *Psittacula himalayana* Lesson (Slaty-headed Parakeet), *P. finschii* Hume (Hume's Parakeet), *P. cyanocephala* Linnaeus (Blossom-headed Parakeet), and *P. roseata* Biswas (Biswas' Parakeet). Lord Walter Rothschild built up one of the largest ever private collections of natural history specimens, sampled all around the globe through European and native collectors, some of whom he employed and even trained. His extremely valuable research collection was acquired by the American Museum of Natural History, New York, which, as a result, turned the second largest store-house of Oriental zoological material, after the Natural History Museum in London. His daughter, Miriam, became an entomological specialist on Fleas (Siphonaptera) and who, in collaboration with Theresa Clay, wrote the classic work FLEAS, FLUKES AND CUCKOOS (1952, Collins, London, 304 pp.). Inskipp, Lindsey & Duckworth (1996: 54) cite most of the pertinent references [except of Walter Rothschild, 1907, *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Club*, 19(131): 49-50], which in turn give the others dealing with *P. intermedia*. J.M. Forshaw (1973 & 1977, *Parrots of the World*, Melbourne) printed the only coloured illustration of this species. Like Biswas had opined (1959, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 56: 562), Rothschild's Parakeet perhaps "co-exists with either or both" Slaty-headed and Hume's Parakeets "in the altitudinal zone of approximately 1800-2400 metres" on the Himalayas. Its type-locality is unknown, but presumed to be Sikkim, as most of Rothschild's collectors worked there. But this may not be correct and *P. intermedia* may be existing as a small population only in the Garhwal—Kumaon—western Nepal zone of the Himalayas. However, as Biswas had also further commented that – "great portions of the Himalayas, particularly the Assam Himalayas, remain yet to be faunistically explored", it may also occur east of Nepal at altitudes similar to, or a little lower than, those frequented by *P. himalayana*. Finally, as indicated by my senior Dipterist (student of true flies) colleague George Steyskal (then at the U.S. National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C.) who is quoted above, a more thorough search among specimens of the related species of *Psittacula* named earlier, and held in museums, could turn up more *P. intermedia* material?

One other threatened species, that is only known from the Garhwal—Kumaon area, is what is incorrectly called the Mountain (or Himalayan) Quail (280 – *Ophrysia superciliosa* J.E. Gray). Only 10 specimens of this bird are available in museums, collected from altitudes similar to what Rothchild's Parakeet perhaps inhabits. Calling this bird a "quail" has been a misleading deviation from ornithological fact. This species is placed in a monotypic genus whose closest relatives are the Blood Pheasant (*Ithaginis*) and Spurfowl (*Galloperdix*); perhaps the Bush Quails (*Perdicula*) or even the Hill Partridges (*Arborophila*)? Ripley (1952, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 50: 904-905, Pl. II) wrote that it was classified "as a small partridge" which "is primarily a runner, not a flyer". It was first placed in the genus *Rollulus* by J.E. Gray, which now has a single species *rouloul* Scopoli (Green Wood-Quail or Crested Partridge) assigned to it, that is distributed from Tenasserim to Sumatra and Borneo [see NEW FAUNA 5: 368; 1928]. What we need capable, experienced, taxonomists to do is to make phylogenetic (cladistic also) analyses of bird groups, using every kind of morphological, anatomical, physiological, biochemical, biogeographical, behavioural, *etc.*, data available. Only then will clear-cut evolutionary relationships become apparent to ornithologists and bird watchers. Until these kinds of data are presented, we can only do 'guess-work'! Brigadier Talwar (Retd) gave a good summary of data (*NLBW* 35: 32-33; 1995) on what I would call a **Mountain Pygmy Partridge**. Hume's conjecture that this is "possibly a migrant from the well-wooded south-eastern portions of Chinese Tibet", only during "severe winters" is hardly plausible, like Talwar also believes; this pygmy partridge being a poor flier and incapable of long distance aerial migrations. My 'instinct' does, however, prod me to consider the real possibility of this bird being a denizen of tall grassland niches in *swampy* tracts, perhaps in flood-plains beside mountain streams, which would encourage growth of the tall grass jungle it selectively inhabits. These are the micro-niches that are under threat on the Himalayas and may account for the fall in populations of such specialized birds. Flightlessness is known to be a feature of typically high mountain insects (beetles, especially). So, search for this pygmy partridge in higher, swampy habitats in the Garwhal—Kumaon—western Nepal Himalaya may be a better strategy, if made in collaboration with the native expertise of local bird trappers (see Rajat Bhargava, 1995, *NLBW* 35: 102-104). The other writings on this phasianid have been by E. Comber (1905, *J.B.N.H.S.* 16: 361-362), E.C. Stuart Baker (1921, *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Club*, 42: 35), and by Salim Ali [1977, *NLBW* 17(5): 1-2].

I will deal briefly with one other threatened bird species, Blewitt's Wood Owl (653 – *Athene blewitti* Hume) which was finally re-discovered by Ben King, Pamela Rasmussen and David Abbott (*Pitta* # 81, January 1998) on the Satpura Hills in Khandesh, between the Narmada and Tapti Rivers, where J. Davidson (*Stray Feathers*, 10: 292; 1882) had earlier shot them and despatched, what he thought were Spotted Owlets, to Hume who had described this remarkable Wood Owl in 1873 (*Stray Feathers* 1: 467-469) and also erected a new genus, *Heteroglaux*, for it. Rasmussen comments on its resemblance to the genus *Glaucidium*, which includes our Jungle Owlet, but I would not be surprised if *Heteroglaux* is actually the right generic placement for this "apparently highly diurnal" owl, which Davidson had found perched on tops of thin, exposed trees "late in the morning". The INDIAN HANDBOOK (3: 303; 1969) says it is "partial to the neighbourhood of streams", so its diurnal habit, perching on tops of exposed tree branches above streams or other water-bodies, could possibly be a strategy to 'hawk' insects, like dragonflies and aquatic beetles, emerging from the water or adjacent soil and flying above them in some numbers?

Except for Jerdon's Courser, Great Indian Bustard, Yellow-throated Bulbul and other threatened species, which are decidedly dry country inhabitants (I will write about these in a future Letter), isn't it interesting that the three forest birds dealt with above are all quite possibly

attached to *aquatic ecosystems* in still dense, undisturbed jungles? Rajat Bhargava may well look for Rothschild's Parakeet in jungle flanking Himalayan streams or even marshes, at the right altitudes and perhaps get lucky with a 'bird in the hand'?

[Rasmussen's recent article in *Hornbill* # 84, pp. 4-9 (March 1998), was received after the above Letter was written. Her suggestion that "reinstatement of the genus *Heteroglaux*....may be warranted" does feel good! Unfortunately, she indulges more in Meinertzhagen-bashing than in giving the interested reader more data on the actual habitat and behaviour of Blewitt's Wood Owl, which, as she writes, "were sent to Dr Asad Rahmani of the Bombay Natural History Society." The fairly satisfactory photographs printed show an owl which looks a relic of Gondwanaland, and whose closest living relation may still be ludicrously "tail-wagging" in the lowland water-side forests of north-east Africa? Field searches should now be carried out along the tributaries of the River Mahanadi in the Chhattisgarh—Kalahandi area, on the Madhya Pradesh—Orissa border, where F.R. Blewitt and V. Ball secured the other, earlier, existing specimens of Blewitt's Wood Owl. Even if Meinertzhagen's "Mandvi [on the River Tapti], October 1914", specimen is really one of J. Davidson's "in the heavy jungle below the Satpuras" series, poor old Colonel Richard's concocted data isn't really far from what now applies to the distribution and habitat of this re-discovered Wood Owl.

Aasheesh Pittie has kindly sent me a synoptic paper (photocopy) on Rothschild's Parakeet by Carol & Tim Inskipp (1955, *O.B.C. Bull.*, # 22, pp. 29-31, col. pl.) which cites all the references on this bird. The problem with the colour of its lower mandible is perhaps a question of scientific credibility. S.R. Sane and his colleagues are evidently wrong in so many of their statements and reasoning that I prefer to stick by Rothschild's original description, the "Under mandible orange-yellow". The Inskipps' claim that this parakeet was "reportedly trapped" near Benares (*Varanasi* in native tongue) and "Mattiyar" (where is this? Mirzapur?) suggests a riverine habitat, but I have my doubts if these plains-trapped birds were really *intermedia* or just variants of the Blossom-headed Parakeet, with black lower beaks/bills.

Heteroglaux blewitti's closest Indian relative is possibly *Glaucidium brodiei* Burton (635 – Collared Pygmy Owlet). Salim Ali & Dillon Ripley's description of the latter's habitat (see INDIAN HANDBOOK 3: 285-286; 1969) is eerily reminiscent of that made by the three United States' ornithologists on the recently re-discovered *blewitti*. The food of both these owls must also be similar — large insects, besides small birds, rodents and lizards. Stuart Baker's notes on *brodiei*, embellished with two 'antique' colour plates by the legendary H. Grönvold, suggests "Its principal diet is insects" (NEW FAUNA 4: 450-453, pls VI & VII; 1927). Abbott's notes (kind courtesy A.P.) are more illuminating, the "harrying antics" of the Indian Rollers most certainly a fight for their insect food territory, not protection of nestlings at that time of the year (November).]

– Dr. Kumar Ghorpadé

[**Errata** in Letter # 16 – Line 3 from bottom of quotation should read "from one thermal", Line 1 of text "last month", Line 3 of para 4 "now in an", and Line 8 of last para should read "(Loranthaceae)".]

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Rishi Valley (VS) 15-29.4

BONELLI'S EAGLE 16.4: 2; SHORT-TOED EAGLE lone birds; PEREGRINE (SHAHIN ?) FALCON 21.4: 1 in flt; SPOTTED DOVE PRB, courtship disp.; LITTLE BROWN DOVE PRB, courtship disp., & calls. 1 chasing Tree Pie.; KOEL POB, in song; HOUSE SWIFT PRB, N in cave rocks; LITTLE GREEN BEE-EATER CB, entering N with food; HOOPOE CB, with food in bill & calling throughout day; COPPERSMITH CB, feeding yng in N; INDIAN PITTA Seen/hrd till 29.4; BROWN SHRIKE single birds; GREY DRONGO 28.4: 1; JUNGLE CROW 19.4: CB, 1 incubating; REDVENTED BULBUL feeding on sandalwood berries; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER CB, with fecal matter & food in bill; TAILORBIRD PRB, territorial fights; TICKELL'S LEAF WARBLER (?) 19.4: 1; DULL GREEN LEAF WARBLER seen/hrd till 29.4; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL CB, with food in bill, also juv., seen; THICKBILLED FLOWERPECKER 1; TICKELL'S FLOWERPECKER feeding on Sandalwood *Santalum album* berries; PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD PRB, entering N; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD 1 in eclipse plm; PURPLE SUNBIRD CB, with food in bill; INDIAN ROBIN CB, M with food in bill.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

CIEFL Campus

BARN OWL 15.4 (JVDM); INDIAN PITTA 28.5 (SP).

Hyderabad city 4.6 (HJ)

SHIKRA 5.3: sunbathing on ground; HOUSE CROW PRB, 1 F mating with 2 M one after the other.[1]

Nehru Zoological Park 10.5 (YM)

PARIAH KITE POB, carrying N-mat.; BLACK DRONGO CB, 1 N with 1 chick.

Osmania University campus 5.1998 (MSK)

SHIKRA catching Indian Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus coromandra* in flt & feeding on it on perch.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus, Patancheru (SQ)

YELLOW BITTERN 27.5; LESSER ADJUTANT 29-30.5: 1 Icrisat Lake & roosting in Banyan tree *Ficus bengalensis*; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 27.5: 300; REDHEADED MERLIN 28.5: Pair on Palm tree. 3.6: 1; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 28.5; LESSER GOLDENBACKED WOODPECK-ER 7.6: 1; WHITEBROWED BULBUL 4.6: 1; BLACKHEADED MUNIA 29.5: *c.* 15. 3.6: *c.* 10.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Ibrahimpatnam Tank 25.4 (HJ)

OPENBILL STORK 37; HOOPOE CB, ad., with yng.

Mamidipalli 29.4 (HJ)

BLACK IBIS; BONELLI'S EAGLE PRB, 2 with a juv., F; SCAVENGER VULTURE CB, N; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL.

Shamirpet Lake 17.5 (AP)

REDWATTLED LAPWING CB, 1 N with 3 eggs. Ad., incubating; ASHYCROWNED FINCH-LARK CB, ad., F., feeding yng; SYKES' CRESTED LARK PRB, ad., with food in bill.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore City

DARTER 20.5: 1 over Ulsoor Tank with cormorants (RA); COUCAL 1.4: PRB, N under const., was destroyed by Bonnet Macaques *Macaca radiata* on 26.4 (BVN); SMALL GREEN BARBET 22.5: CB, entering N (in Tulip

Tree *Spathodea campanulata*) with food (SK); INDIAN MYNA 22.5: POB, 2 N 1 carrying feather into N & other entering N hole (SK); REDWHISKERED BULBUL 28.5: CB, 1 N with 3 chicks, 4' up in bush (sp. ?) (AP, AmP); WHITE-EYE 17.5: CB, incubating 3 pale blue eggs in N suspended 4'6" up Silver Oak *Grewelia robusta* (PSM).; SPOTTED MUNIA 28.5: PRB, with N-mat., (AP, AmP).

Cubbon Park, Bangalore city 24.5 (AP, AmP)

SMALL GREEN BARBET CB, N., *c*., 20' up on underside of branch. Ad., bringing insect (sp. ?) to N; JUNGLE CROW PRB, 1 with N-mat..

Magadi Road (TNAP)

BARN OWL 24.11.1997: CB, N in Neem tree *Azadirachta indica* hollow. 4 eggs. 3 fledged during 1st week of Feb 1998. Ad., fed rats (sp. ?) & Grey Musk Shrew *Suncus murinus* to yng; COLLARED SCOPS OWL 12.1997: CB, N with 1 egg; SPOTTED OWLET 12.1997: Ad., carrying food to N.

BIJAPUR DISTRICT (RBN)

Ghataprabha River basin 21.4

LARGE EGRET 2 ad.; POND HERON *c*. 50 ad.; LITTLE EGRET *c*. 100+ ad.; WHITE IBIS 3 ad.; SPOTBILL DUCK 2 ad.

Mudhol Town

BLACK IBIS 7.5: CB, 2 ad., on N atop Mango *Mangifera indica*; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING 30.5: CB, 1 ad., with 1 yng; MOTTLED WOOD OWL 29,30.4: 3 ad., on neem tree; GREY HORNBILL 20.4: 3; BRAHMINY MYNA 30.4: POB, near hollow in tree.

MYSORE DISTRICT

Nagarahole National Park

GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER 5.1998: 1 (PSM).

Talvekere Tank 22.5 (AP, AmP, VB)

GREY PELICAN 7; DARTER 2; GREY HERON 1; PURPLE HERON 1; CATTLE EGRET POB, in br., plm; PAINTED STORK 6; WHITE IBIS 3; BLACK IBIS 13.

SHIMOGA DISTRICT (RBN)

Anandapuram Village, Sagar Taluk 21.5

POND HERON 20; LITTLE EGRET 50+ POB in br., plm; PURPLE MOORHEN 10.

KERALA

IDIKKI DISTRICT (RM)

Munnar 8-12.5

SHAHEED FLACON 2 (Rajamalai Sanctuary); EMERALD DOVE 2 (Letchmi tea gardens); INDIAN LORIKEET; SPECKLED PICULET; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE; ASHY SWALLOW-SHRIKE; HILL MYNA; SCARLET MINIVET; FAIRY BLUEBIRD CB, several carrying food in bill to N in wild Jack Fruit *Artocarpus* sp. trees; NILGIRI PIPIT; LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER 2 pairs.

Peermade, Muringupuzha Coffee & Cardamom Estates 21.2

SHIKRA; CRESTED GOSHAWK; RUFOUSBELLIED EAGLE; BLACK EAGLE; RED SPURFOWL; GREEN IMPERIAL PIGEON; NILGIRI WOOD PIGEON; INDIAN LORIKEET; MALABAR TROGON; SMALL GREEN BARBET; GREATER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO; HILL MYNA; SCARLET MINIVET; FAIRY BLUEBIRD; BLACK AND ORANGE FLYCATCHER; NILGIRI FLYCATCHER; CHESTNUT-BELLIED NUTHATCH.

MAHARASHTRA

NASHIK DISTRICT (BR, SG)

Gangapur Dam

PAINTED PARTRIDGE 24.5: CB, 2 ad., & 2 yng seen; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING 18.5: CB, N with 3 downy yng. 20.5: CB, N with 4 eggs. 24.5: CB, N with 4 eggs; INDIAN COURSER 24.5: CB, pair with 1 yng; ASHYCROWNED FINCH-LARK 12.5: CB, 2 N with 2 eggs each, 1 N with 1 yng; RUFOUSTAILED FINCH-LARK 20.5: CB, 1 N with 4 eggs.

TAMIL NADU

COIMBATORE DISTRICT

Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary 5.1998 (RM)

CEYLON FROGMOUTH 1. Hiccup like call repeated every 2-3 seconds.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c*.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Pittie (AP); A Poddar (AmP); B Raha (BR); BV Nitin (BVN); H Jaffer (HJ); JVD Moorty (JVDM); MS Kulkarni (MSK); PS Madhusudan (PSM); RB Naik (RBN): R Arvind (RA); R Mathew (RM); S Gudsoorkar (SG); S Karthikeyan (SK); S Padmanabhan (SP); S Quader (SQ); TNA Perumal (TNAP); V Bhagat (VB); V Santharam (VS); Y Malini (YM).

NOTES: [1] "there is good circumstantial evidence for more than occasional promiscuity in the mating". (COMPACT HANDBOOK 5: 246; 1987).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

.....continued from page 1

Sasha Sorokin has been monitoring these two birds, in India and in Russia, since the early 1980's. In the winter of 1995/96, he was able to confirm that this was indeed the Keoladeo-Kunovat pair after colour banding their chick on the nesting grounds in Russia and following the birds to India. This is now the only pair of Siberian cranes that are known to visit India. Last winter, they arrived in Keoladeo National Park on 17th November. They were accompanied by one other adult Siberian Crane. Three and a half months later, at 10.20 am on 4th March (ref. Ms Shruti Sharma, Director KNP), they took off for their long and hazardous journey to their nesting ground in western Russia. Three pairs of Eurasian Cranes are nesting near the pair of "Sibes" at Kunovat and Russian scientists plan to exchange their eggs with those from captive Siberian Cranes from the Oka Nature Reserve in June. [Belinda Wright <blue @giasdl01.vsnl.net.in> on <nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU>]

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